

Chapter Twenty-five – Wood Stoves

Two weeks later, Acton, CA, Ron and Linda's home, around 7 pm...

"Ron, Clarence," Gary exclaimed, "When did you get back?"

"Late last night," Ron answered.

"How did it go in Colorado?" Gary asked.

"Partner, The first thing we did when we got there was to pick up a cell phone and solar charger for Damon." Ron explained, "We also picked up a chain saw and some building materials at a lumber yard. We drove down to the farm and erected a semi-permanent shelter for Damon using the aspens and the building materials."

"How is he doing?" Gary asked.

"He was cold, tired and glad to see us," Clarence replied, "But you'd be surprised Gary, it's like that boy took a new lease on life."

"So, continue," Gary said, "Sorry I interrupted."

"Anyway, we took one of the wood stoves with us and set that up for him," Clarence continued. Then, we loaded up and drove back to Pueblo. Damon was positively overjoyed at the prospect of some real food and a hot shower. The next morning, we took him and got him a Colorado's driver's license. I didn't know he was an over the road trucker, Gary, you never mentioned that."

"Hasn't been for a while Clarence, he stopped 2 or 3 years ago." Gary remarked.

"After that," Ron resumed, "We stopped by the gun dealer's and talked to him about the SKS's and the ammo. I think that we're going to be all right there. We drove back to the farm after lunch.

"John Jacobs was there with your cousin, John Aspen. We showed your cousin around the farm, the snow is pretty much melted off by the way, and persuaded him to stay over for the night. Damon had a lot of the burned wood stacked and ready to burn, too."

"That's good news," Gary said.

"The next morning," Ron said, "We took John and looked up that implement dealer. The prices there weren't much different than they we in Lancaster. To make a long story short, we got to visiting with John at lunch."

"Which John," Gary asked.

"Your cousin John," Ron laughed. "It seems that even though he retired last year, he hasn't had a farm sale to sell off his machinery yet. He said something about waiting for the economy to turn around. We suggested that we might be willing to buy his equipment. Told him we'd pay him more than he could get at an auction. He suggested that we drive up to Ft. Collins and look the machinery over. So, we did."

"REALLY?" Gary exclaimed.

"Yep." Ron reported, "He and his wife, Barb, even insisted that we stay with them. It seems that Barb is retiring next month from her job. She and John are talking about selling off everything and moving back to Iowa. He mentioned some town, Bassett, I think."

"Yeah, that's a tiny little town about 7 miles east of Charles City," Gary offered. "John was raised on a farm about 3 miles north of Bassett."

"We ended up staying with them for 3 days," Clarence added.

"Oh?" Gary questioned.

"It seems that John is the one who wants to move back to Iowa," Clarence explained. "Barb, on the other hand, wants to stay in Colorado because all of their children and grandkids are there. They have three kids and 8 grandchildren with another on the way."

"I didn't know that," Gary commented.

"It's like I told you back in Charles City, Gary," Clarence went on, "You need to keep in closer touch with your relatives. Anyway, I suggested that John and Barb join us at *The Ark*. John was pretty reluctant, at first, but Barb seemed interested right away. She said that one of their children lived in Colorado Springs and the others in Denver. I heard them arguing one night and the next morning, John was talking about maybe they should consider moving down to the farm.

"Ron and I talked about it and decided that John has every bit of the equipment that we need. I know that it was very presumptuous of us, but we sat down and talked to John. We explained the whole thing to him; it took most of a day. Eventually, we suggested that if he were to donate his farm equipment to the Homeowner's Association, we would give him the fair market value of the equipment in corporate stock. They, we suggested, could keep the money they got for their house and would, in the end be better off than anything else they could manage."

"AND?" Gary said, barely able to contain his excitement.

"If the group agrees, they will be joining us in a month at *The Ark*," Ron announced. "I move that we accept John and Barb into our community, do I hear a second?"

“Aye!” came a reply from the group.

“And, do I hear any Nays?” Ron asked.

The silence was deafening.

“Well, that being the case, they’re in.” Ron concluded. “After we left John and Barb’s we returned to Pueblo and stayed in a motel. Clarence suggested that we check out building material suppliers while we were there. We ended up purchasing a lot of building hardware, a bunch of cement, and a couple of truckloads of lumber. We had it all delivered to the farm before we left. Oh, and while we were at the farm, a truck arrived with a huge order from Walton’s. Lyn, what did you ladies work out on the food while Clarence and I were gone?”

“Ron,” Linda began, “What we eventually decided to do was to purchase 40 of the deluxe one year food storage units. Plus, we purchased the Country living grain mill, extra burrs and a motorization kit. In addition, we purchased 160 gallons of vegetable oil and a couple of hundred pounds of sugar.”

“Well, that explains that!” Ron said.

Explains what, dear?” Linda sweetly asked.

“There was a whole truckload of food, Linda,” Ron retorted, “A whole truckload! Hell, it must have weighed 15 or 20 tons! And, how much, I’m almost afraid to ask, did all of that cost?”

“It didn’t cost a thing dear, not one red cent!” Linda coyly replied.

“But how...” Ron began.

“Ron, I called my sister.” Linda explained. “We went down to Hermosa to visit Daddy. He has money to burn and intends to give it all to charity anyway. So...”

“So, you figured charity begins at home and...” Ron started to reply.

“We explained to him all about this new non-profit corporation in Colorado that was building a retirement community.” Linda continued. “It took a bit of doing, but we managed to persuade him to donate \$50,000 to the charity.”

“But Linda, the Homeowners Association isn’t a charity!” Ron protested.

“No, it’s not.” Linda retorted. “But, my sister wants to join us and she was all for it. He’s so senile that he won’t remember even writing the check by next week. She made some remark about the Mason’s not missing the money anyway. And, while we were at it, she and I talked about selling the rental property we own together. We figured that a bird in

the hand is worth many in the bush. Besides Ronald, if things really fall apart, I doubt that we will ever see another penny's rent from the place."

"But Lyn..." Ron began.

"Don't you but Lyn me!" she responded. "Our savings are nearly depleted. We need the money. Besides, dear, it's none of YOUR business what Shelia and I do with OUR property."

Ron sat in stunned silence. He realized that Linda was right. First, they needed the money; second, it really was none of his business; and third, the Mason's really wouldn't miss the money.

"So, everyone," Linda continued, "I would like to nominate my sister, Shelia, for membership in our community. Do I hear a second?"

"Aye!" came a reply from the group.

"And, do I hear any Nays?" Linda asked.

Once again, the silence was deafening.

"We sold our home!" Clarence announced.

"So soon?" Ron asked.

"Yep," Clarence replied, "The first couple that looked at it fell in love with it. So in love, I might add, that they offered our asking price. We accepted."

"But we only got home last night," Ron said.

"That's right my friend and Lucy already had their offer," Clarence explained, "We accepted it this morning. From what the realtor said, they have a substantial down payment, both have good jobs and he thinks that the financing will be a breeze."

"I have an announcement to make," Fred chimed in. "All of the medical supplies arrived yesterday. But more importantly, Jan and I would like to announce that we are expecting our first child."

All at once, the room was a buzz of conversation, the men slapping Fred on the back, and the women hugging Jan. After a few minutes, it settled down and Chris spoke up.

"I bought a couple of used 5-ton trucks," he announced. "They need a lot of work, but Matt and I are working around the clock getting them ready. We need another week and they will be just like new. Oh, and Patti and I have an offer on our house, too. We haven't accepted it yet, but, I've been thinking that if I sell off my race car and all of the

racings junk I've accumulated, it might make up for what the offer is short. On the other hand, maybe we'll counter offer, we haven't decided."

"We don't have an offer yet," Gary said somewhat dejectedly. "But, with some persuasion, David and Lorrie have decided to join us, if that's ok with the group. They will contribute a lot of manpower."

Without being asked to vote, the group announced, "Aye!"

"Fred and I talked to Udell," Clarence confided. "That boy has a powerful thirst. What do you think Fred, did we get his attention?"

"I really don't think so Uncle Clarence," Fred admitted. "But I could be wrong."

"I can tell you one thing," Sharon announced, "Amy is ready to dump him and come with us to Colorado. Maybe if you and Fred would talk to him one more time and explain the facts of life, he'll come around. If not, good riddance."

"I take it that you don't care for Udell," Clarence quizzed.

"I don't," Sharon admitted, "And before you say another word, it has nothing to do with his race. Amy met him in a drug rehab about 7 years ago. She has 7½ years clean and sober. I frankly doubt that he has 7½ days clean and sober. And, I know about drunks! My dad was a wonderful man, but he was a drunk. So were both of my brothers.

"My dad sobered up and I have nothing but respect for a person who admits that they have a problem and addresses it. Besides, I seem to recall you men talking about growing corn and producing your own whiskey. Do you really believe, Clarence or Fred, that Udell would be able to resist the temptation of having whiskey around by the barrel full? I don't think so, but I could be wrong."

The group was silent after Sharon's outburst.

To break the silence, Ron suggested, "Why don't we table the subject of Amy and Udell for the moment, until Clarence and Fred talk to him one more time? Gary, how did your trip to San Jose turn out?"

"I thought that you'd never ask," Gary replied humming *Do You Know the Way to San Jose*. "I do believe that I've solved the problem with our having a bunch of flechette ammo and a lifetime's supply of double aught buck!"

"Well, do tell," Ron, said.

Nope," Gary replied, "Tomorrow, partner, you and I are going to San Jose.

Chapter Twenty-six – Thumper

Acton, CA, 6 am, the next day...

Ring...Ring...Ring...

“Hello?” came a gravelly voice.

“What?” Gary laughed, “You mean you’re not up yet?”

“Son-of-a-...” Ron growled. “What the hell time is it?”

“6 am!” Gary announced, “Get your butt in gear partner, I want to be in San Jose before noon!”

“Pick me up in an hour,” Ron said slamming down the phone.

Precisely one hour later, Ron heard a horn honk. He grabbed his coat and a couple of extra packs of smokes and lumbered out the door.

“You SOB!” Ron laughed, “You would have to call at 6 am! Hell, I waited to call you until 7:45 the other day.”

“Gotta make hay while the sun shines,” Gary replied. “Fasten your seat belt, and I’ll have us in San Jose before lunch.”

“Ah bull,” Ron retorted, “There isn’t any way you can do that.”

“Ron my best trip ever,” Gary continued, “Was 4 hours and 15 minutes back in ’91.”

“Anyway, what’s this big surprise of yours?” Ron asked.

“I’d tell you,” Gary offered, “But that would spoil the surprise.”

About 11:20 am, Gary parked the car next to a shop in San Jose. “I’m slipping” he said, “must be getting old. Come on Ron, let’s go.”

“Hold on a minute partner while I pop my ears and unfasten my seatbelt.” Ron replied shaking his head.

Ron followed Gary into a machine shop that had a sign over the door “Branch’s Machine Shop.”

“Bob, I’d like you to meet my friend Ron Green,” Gary said making introductions, “Ron this fine gentleman is Bob Branch, machinist extraordinaire!”

“You didn’t say anything to him did you?” Bob said nervously.

“No, not until you met him and were comfortable with him knowing,” Gary said.

“Knowing what?” Ron demanded.

“Care for a beer?” Bob asked.

“It’s a little early for me, but what the hell, sure, I’ll take a beer,” Ron answered politely.

“Well good,” Bob said, slurring his words slightly, “I’d never trust a man who wouldn’t drink a beer before noon if the circumstances called for it.”

“It’s over here Gary,” Bob said nodding his head.

“Well SON-OF-A...” Ron started to say, “Is that a Gatling gun?”

“Yessir,” Bob replied. “Made it myself!”

“I’ll be a son of a gun,” Ron said. “How’s it work?”

“It works just fine,” Bob laughed. “A couple of weeks ago, Gary showed up on my door step. Hell I thought he’d gone back to Iowa. But, there he stood. Wanted to know if I still built Gatling guns. I hadn’t built one in 7 or 8 years, but he explained that he had a problem and he was certain that a Gatling gun was the solution. We talked it over and I agreed to build him a 12-gauge gun. Here, read this,” Bob said handing Ron a piece of paper.

The Gatling gun saw only limited use in the Civil War, but the conflict tested this weapon, perhaps the first successful machine gun used in warfare. Invented by Dr. Richard Jordan Gatling, the Civil War model served as the precursor of more successful models.

The Gatling gun was a hand-crank-operated weapon with six barrels revolving around a central shaft. The cartridges were fed to the gun by gravity through a hopper mounted on the top of the gun. Six cam-operated bolts alternately wedged, fired, and dropped the bullets, which were contained in steel chambers. Gatling used the six barrels to partially cool the gun during firing. Since the gun was capable of firing 600 rounds a minute, each barrel fired 100 rounds per minute.

The gun had a number of problems, however. The bores were tapered, and often the barrels and chambers did not exactly align, affecting accuracy and velocity. The chamber system itself, in which a paper cartridge was contained inside a capped steel chamber, was both expensive and fragile. While the gun showed much promise and fired the standard .58-caliber ammunition, it had so many drawbacks and was so radical in design and purpose that Gatling was unable to interest the U.S. government. The army purchased none of his guns, but Maj. Gen. Benjamin F. Butler, after a field test, pur-

chased 12 for \$1,000 each. They were used on the Petersburg front in 1864 and were apparently considered successful. That, however, was the only service the guns saw.

In January, 1865 Gatling's improved model 1865 gun was tested by the Ordnance Department. Among other things, this weapon used rimfire copper-cased cartridges instead of the steel-chambered paper variety. Though this model did not see service, it was adopted officially in 1866. Having at least received government approval, Gatling began to sell his guns throughout the world; they achieved lasting fame in the post-war years.

“Do you see those blueprints hanging over there on the wall?” Bob asked.

Ron looked, and then walked over to get a closer look. They were the blueprints for Gatling’s model 1865 gun.

“I bought a copy of the patent from the patent office a number of years ago.” Bob explained. “I expect that I’ve made a half dozen or so of the guns over the years. Made some improvements, too. Anyway, Gary brought me the twenty-inch barrel for his shot-gun and I took all of the measurements. I made these barrels out of a better grade of steel than that Remington barrel. And, I made them a lot heavier, too, to handle the heat; they are 20”, cylinder bore barrels. I fashioned a drum magazine that holds 200 rounds. In fact, I just finished the last of the lot.”

Ron just stared not knowing what to say.

“Bob, did you test fire it?” Gary asked.

“Sure did, Gary,” he replied, “And it’s a damn good thing I did, too. I had to rework the magazines to get it to feed right, but it works fine now.

“How many magazines did you make?” Gary asked.

“Twenty, just like you asked,” Bob smiled.

“Bob, I don’t know what to say,” Gary replied, “This worked out better than I had hoped.”

“Don’t say anything yet, Gary,” Bob replied, “Check this out.”

Bob removed the hand crank and slid an electric motor arrangement over the shaft. The motor was mounted on a bracket that aligned with a plate welded on to one of the tripod legs. Bob slipped a couple of bolts into the holes and clipped the two leads from the motor to a car battery. He then pressed down on a large red button mounted on a plate attached to the motor. The barrels began to revolve giving off a loud whirrrr sound.

“That’s a 3,000 rpm motor,” Bob said, “It will empty a magazine in 20 seconds flat. Had a bit of trouble with that at first, what with the amount of torque it required to turn the

shaft. The handle, you'll notice, is 12" long. I had to come up with that gear arrangement to increase the torque and reduce the RPM's. The actual cyclic rate of fire is 600 rounds per minute, just like the original Gatling gun."

"But, is it legal?" Ron asked.

"Is what legal?" Bob asked.

"The Gatling gun!" Ron said.

"What Gatling gun?" Bob persisted, looking around, "I don't see a Gatling gun anywhere!"

"Oh right," Ron replied, "Could I have another beer?"

[hand cranked Gatling Guns are not a NFA weapon, "ATF and its predecessor agency, the Internal Revenue Service (IRS), have historically held that the original, crank-operated Gatling Gun, and replicas thereof, are not automatic firearms or machineguns as defined. See Rev. Rul. 55-528, 1955-2 C.B. 482. The original Gatling Gun is a rapid-firing, hand-operated weapon. The rate of fire is regulated by the rapidity of the hand cranking movement, manually controlled by the operator. It is not a "machinegun" as that term is defined in 26 U.S.C. 5845(b) because it is not a weapon that fires automatically"]

Bob laughed, handed Ron a beer and he and Gary carefully wrapped the disassembled weapon components into canvas and put the components into Gary's trunk.

"Bob, what do I owe you?" Gary asked.

"Well... Bob hesitated. I went out on the Internet and looked up Gatling guns. I found a place overseas, I think that is in New Zealand, that gets \$9,000 for a .22 caliber 1/2 scale Gatling gun. Things have been a little slow, do you think you could part with \$4,500?"

Gary didn't say another word. He wrote out a check for \$5,000 even and handed it to Bob. Bob's eyes bugged out when he saw the amount of the check.

"Gee, thanks Gary," Bob stumbled.

"Thank you Bob!" Gary said, "Come on Ron, I'll have to drive slower going home."

Gary drove a conservative 65 miles per hour all the way back to Acton. Ron alternated between shaking his head and mumbling, "A danged Gatling gun, who would have thought?"

They arrived in Acton a little after 6 pm. Gary and Ron carefully unloaded the components and placed them in Gary's storage shed. Ron promised not to discuss their pur-

chase with anyone until they reached Colorado. Gary dropped Ron off and headed for home, well pleased with the outcome. "Hmm," he thought, "I wonder how many 12-gauge rifled slugs Herb has?"

When Gary got home, he dropped into his recliner and turned on CNN. He was startled to learn that the Israelis were threatening to bomb Riyadh. "Crap, crap, crap!" he thought.

He grabbed the phone and called Ron.

"Ron, did you see the news?" he asked.

"I'm watching the Fox channel right now, partner, it doesn't look good." Ron replied.

"I'm beginning to think that we waited too long," Gary complained.

"Gary, if the Israelis were going to bomb Riyadh, they would have done it and then announced it," Ron said, trying to calm his friend. "If it will make you feel any better, call Herb and get his read on the situation. Meanwhile, I'll call everyone in the group. Can Sharon and you be over here around 7:30?"

"7:30 tonight or 7:30 tomorrow morning?" Gary asked.

"Tonight," Ron replied.

"Well, I guess so, sure," Gary said, "We'll be there."

Chapter Twenty-seven – The Alert

Just as Gary laid the phone in the cradle, it rang. “Hello?” he said.

“Hi Dad, it’s Mary,” Mary said.

“Hi Mary,” Gary said, “How are you?”

“I’m fine. Derek just called.” She said.

“Oh?” Gary responded.

“Yes. Before he left, we worked out sort of a code,” Mary continued. “If I understood him right, they have just been placed on alert.”

“Did he indicate why?” Gary asked.

“He made what I think was an indirect reference to CNN,” Mary answered. “He mentioned his ‘old friend Bernard Shaw’, so I assumed CNN. I can only guess, but I think that it has something to do with that mess with the Israelis and the Saudis.”

“Mary I’m sure that everything will be ok,” Gary said trying to reassure his daughter-in-law. “But, if push comes to shove, can you get to Pueblo?”

“Yes,” Mary said starting to cry.

“Mary, it WILL be ok,” Gary sought to calm her. “Why don’t you go over to Herb and June’s? I was just going to call Herb anyway.”

“Ok,” she mumbled and hung up the phone.

Gary quickly called Herb. “Hello?” Herb answered.

“Hi Herb, did Mary make it to your house?” Gary asked.

“She just coming in the front door, Gary,” Herb replied. “What’s up?”

“Have you been watching the news?” Gary asked.

“Yes,” Herb replied, “But if the Israelis were going to do something, they would have done it first and denied it later.”

“That’s almost exactly the same thing that Ron said,” Gary reported. “We’re going to have a meeting tonight to discuss this. Will you and June keep an eye on Mary? Apparently, Derek has been placed on alert and she is damned scared. I am too, as far as that goes.”

“Sure, no problem. And Gary, if the SHTF, I’ll make sure that Mary gets to Pueblo.”

“Thanks Herb, I really appreciate that.” Gary acknowledged, “Well, I’d better get a move on, talk to you soon.”

“Ok Gary, talk to you soon,” Herb replied and hung up.

Gary got Sharon and they drove over to Ron and Linda’s. They were the last to arrive. Everyone was glued to the TV watching the Fox Channel. Ron turned the TV off and they assembled around the dining room table.

“Gar bear?” Ron inquired, “Did you talk to Herb?”

“I did and to Mary too,” Gary replied.

“Oh? You called Mary?” Ron asked.

“No, she called me,” Gary responded. “Derek had just called her. They had some sort of code worked out from what I gather. They had just been put on alert.”

“How did he manage to get a call out?” Ron asked. “Don’t they usually shut down the phones when they go on alert?”

“I hadn’t thought of that,” Gary replied, “Probably has his cell phone with him.”

“Did he indicate why they had been put on alert?” Ron continued to quiz.

“Well he mentioned his ‘old friend Bernard Shaw’ according to Mary and she thinks it was a reference to CNN.”

“Did you talk to Herb?” Ron continued.

“He agreed with you,” Gary replied.

“Chris how near done are you with the trucks?” Ron asked.

“If Matt and I worked all night, we would have the second truck finished,” Chris replied, “Do you think that is necessary?”

“Not really,” Ron replied, “Otherwise, when would it be ready?”

“If Matt works all day,” Chris continued, “And I help him when I get home tomorrow, I’d guess about this time tomorrow night.”

“Why don’t you do it that way,” Ron suggested, “I think that we have a little time before

the SHTF.”

“Let’s do a quick recap,” Ron suggested.

“1. We have the property; and,”

“2. We have food; and,”

“3. We have weapons; and,”

“4. We have vehicles; and,”

“5. We have sold one home; and”

“Make that 2 homes,” Chris said.

“Make that 3 homes,” Fred added.

“And one building,” Linda added.

“Huh, Lyn you didn’t tell me that Shelia and you had sold the building!” Ron scolded Linda gently. “And congratulations Chris Patti, Fred and Jan.”

“5. 3 homes and one building; and, hmm, I think that about covers it.” Ron concluded.

Ron looked at his wife and she held up 2 fingers.

“Lucy and I went to LA today,” Clarence announced. “Remember that we talked about an alternative investment while we were back in Iowa? We can’t do it yet, but we checked it out.”

“Chris, Fred,” Ron continued, smiling at Clarence, “Have you had a chance to sight in your weapons yet?”

“Chris, you said you’re working tomorrow,” Ron said, “Would you mind if I picked up your weapons and test fired them for you?”

“Sure Ron, go ahead,” Chris, replied.

“Fred, are you off tomorrow?” Ron inquired.

“Yes, want to go shooting?” Fred asked.

“You bet,” Ron replied.

“Hey, me too,” Jan announced.

“Ok, shall we say about 10 am?” Ron asked.

“That would be great Ron,” Jan replied, smiling.

“Ok when do you folks think that we want to leave?” Ron asked.

“Not until we sell our house,” Gary quickly answered.

“Partner, we haven’t sold our home either and as far as I am concerned, we can leave the day after tomorrow.” Ron replied.

“But,” Gary protested.

“Gary, can I have a word with you in private?” Ron asked looking at Linda who gave a brief nod.

Ron and Gary went out into the garage. Ron turned to Gary and asked, “Gary, did you hear Linda say that Shelia and she had sold the building?”

Yes, but...” Gary protested.

“Gary, this is just between you and me, do I have your word?” Ron continued ignoring Gary’s protests.

“Ok but...” Gary said.

“Listen partner, we’ve told you about that building before, right?” Ron asked.

“Yes, but...” Gary continued to protest.

“Darn it Gary, Shelia offered to sell the building to the existing tenant.” Ron went on. “In fact she made them an offer that they couldn’t refuse. The building is worth about \$2.5 million; she told them that they could have it for \$2 million cash. Linda just gave me the high sign, they agreed. Hell partner, we’re rolling in money, thanks to Linda’s Dad. If it will make you feel any better, WE will buy your home.”

“That won’t be necessary Ron,” Gary replied, “But just so you know, that Gatling gun ate up a third of our reserve cash. We have just under \$10,000 left. We won’t be able to buy into the Association.”

“You are expecting to clear about \$125,000 on your home, right?” Ron asked.

“Yeah, why?” Gary asked in return.

“Just an idea, Gar Bear, just an idea,” Ron smiled and turned to go back into the house.

Linda looked at Ron as he came back to the dining room. He just raised his eyebrows and smiled.

“Ok, what do you folks say about when we should leave?” Ron readdressed the question.

“How about next week?” Jan suggested.

No one protested.

Chapter Twenty-eight – Moving

Still at the meeting at Ron and Linda's...

“Well folks, it would appear that we have our work cut out for us,” Ron concluded.

“Ron?” Clarence asked, “Could I say a few things?”

“Clarence, the floor is yours,” Ron smiled.

“I’ve been sitting here thinking,” Clarence continued, “Does anyone remember the movie *Heartbreak Ridge*?”

Several members of the group nodded their heads.

“Anyway,” Clarence continued, “I was remembering a part of that movie. Eastwood and his buddy were sitting in the bar and that lady told them that they were on alert. They rushed back to base only to learn, eventually, that it was a practice alert. I was just wondering if the same thing weren’t happening down at Ft. Stewart.”

“You could be right Clarence,” Ron responded, “IF it is a practice, I’m sure that Derek will let Mary know.”

“And, there’s another thing,” Clarence continued, “Even after we pare down our belongings, I don’t believe that they will all fit into two five-ton trucks.”

“Clarence, it seems that you’ve been doing a lot of thinking,” Gary responded, “What do you propose?”

“Well...” Clarence continued, “You remember that article some years back discussing how companies were avoiding property taxes by purchasing those shipping containers and keeping them licensed as over the road vehicles?”

Some of the group nodded their heads, remembering; others had a blank look on their faces. Clearly, no one was getting the point.

“Even though we had the foresight to use those two rolls of plastic to cover the food and the building supplies before we left Pueblo,” Clarence continued, “Once we get there, we are going to need someplace out of the cold and wet to stay until we can get the homes constructed.

“In short, I think that we should consider looking into a couple of shipping containers for ourselves. We can pack all of our household goods in one or both of the containers and leave the trucks free to haul things we haven’t given any thought to.”

“Clarence, I have a few questions,” Ron responded, “Where do we get the containers?”

How much do they cost? How do we get them to Colorado?"

"Ron," Clarence smiled, "After Lucy and I got home from LA today I dug out an old Business to Business Yellow pages and found a listing for containers, and made a call. Used 40' containers are available for as little as \$3,000. And, as far as getting them to Colorado, I'd imagine that we could get some truckers to pull them for us."

"I know one..." Sharon responded, "My friend Jim is an over the road trucker; he might know some other truckers who are looking for an extra haul."

Gary gave his wife what could only be described as a very mean look. "Oh well," he thought, "Sauce for the goose..."

"There you go," Clarence laughed, "The only thing, Ron, is that we've been spending money this last month like we really have money..."

"Well..." Ron replied, "You know, either you start a project like this when you're young, and slowly build it up; or, you accumulate a lifetime's worth of assets and then convert them into MONEY and buy your way in. Hell, I hadn't even thought along these lines until that Y2k thing happened."

"Think about it folks, we are, for the most part a group of relatively successful upper middle-aged people. My apologies to Chris and Patti, Fred and Jan, our younger members, who for the most part have managed to accumulate a little wealth."

"This may not be the best approach, converting our assets and such, but it's the best we can do under the circumstances. We are bound to make mistakes, hell, look at that fiasco with the flechette ammo, but I would say that, by and large, we're doing pretty good."

"Clarence, do you have any more thoughts?" Ron asked.

"Now that you mention it..." Clarence laughed, "I have several more thoughts. We haven't pursued the subject of wind turbines as completely as we should have. And, even if we were to locate and buy a couple of the 50kw wind turbines, we would still have to have them shipped and installed."

"And, what are we going to use for electricity while we are in the building stage? And, where are we going to store 30,000 gallons of biodiesel? And, we really haven't given any thought to the water system or a sewage system."

"And, we haven't followed up on the suggestions about installing electrical generation and solar heating in each individual home. And, who among us knows anything about producing our own methane? Finally, I'm sure that I've overlooked some things, too. Any suggestions?"

Ron sighed, Clarence was right, they DID have more undone than he'd realized. "I'll tell

you what, Clarence,” he began, “I’ll follow up on the wind turbines and the electrical questions, tomorrow. I will even follow up on the solar heating. Give me the number for those container folks and I’ll give them a call too.

“Why don’t you get on the phone to Jacobs and find out where we can get a water tank, a diesel storage tank, and a 5,500-gallon LP storage tank. And, while you’re at it, get the name and number for a wholesaler who can supply us with the hot water heaters and plumbing supplies. Sharon, call your friend Jim and find out about lining up some drivers to pull, say, 3 containers to Colorado.”

“Sure, ok Ron,” Clarence replied, “But how in the hell, pardon my French, are we going to pay for all of this? Not one of us has gotten any money from the sale of our home and...”

Ron cut Clarence off sharply. “Believe me, Clarence,” he said with a twinkle in his eye, “Money is the least of our worries.”

“But how? Where?” Clarence started to ask.

“Clarence,” Linda interrupted, “Do you recall my saying earlier this evening that Shelia and I had sold our building?”

“Yes?” Clarence responded, a question evident in his tone.

“Clarence,” she continued, “We sold the building for cash; the amount isn’t important. Suffice it to say that money is the least of our concerns.”

“Ok, if there are no more questions,” Ron continued, “Let’s assemble here at 7 pm, the day after tomorrow.”

The next two days were long and eventful. Ron, for his part, managed to locate a package that included two 50kw wind turbines and a backup generator. He had the bank wire the money to the manufacturer and had the units drop shipped to Pueblo.

He arranged the purchase of 3 containers complete with running gear and had them delivered to Acton. With Clarence’s help, he had tracked down a solar heating contractor in Pueblo and had arranged for the company to install the solar heating panels on the homes in Pueblo.

Clarence had been busy, too. With John Jacobs help, he had contracted for the installation of a water tank, a huge diesel storage tank and the LP tank. John had supplied him with the name of a couple of suppliers and he’d made arrangements. He had even managed to locate a roofing contractor in Colorado Springs who had experience with the thin-film asphalt shingles.

Sharon had called Jim and had arranged for 3 drivers to pull the containers to Colorado.

And, miracle of miracles, Dan Hartwig had shown their home to two prospective buyers and had two offers for them to consider. Gary had drug the Gatling gun out to the middle of the desert and test fired it.

While the electric motor turned the barrels as advertised, the shells just passed thru the gun without firing. However, when he used the hand crank, the gun operated perfectly. Apparently Bob had overlooked something and he couldn't for the life of him figure out what.

Everyone who had a job gave his or her employers two weeks' notice. Mary had called and said that it had been a false alarm. Indeed, it turned out just to be a drill. However, she explained, something was definitely up; Derek had told her that their training was being accelerated and that he would be home on leave sooner than expected. And, the leave was only for one week, not two. Mary didn't know what it meant, but she would be happy to have him home.

They assembled at Ron and Linda's two nights later as planned. One by one, they filled the group in on what had transpired in the two days since their previous meeting. It was simply amazing what one could accomplish if money were no object.

Clarence announced that he had had a surprise visitor. Udell had shown up at his and Lucy's home shame faced and had asked Clarence for help. They decided, as a group, to postpone the move for a week because everyone had to work out their notice period. Besides, that situation in the Middle East had apparently died down, at least for the moment.

The two weeks seemed to pass in slow motion. Gary and Sharon had sold their home, as had Ron and Linda. They had even managed to get Kevin to pull his head out of his hind end and he, too, would be traveling to Colorado. None of the home sales had closed, however, and the friends made an appointment with Dan Hartwig to discuss their options.

Apparently there were no problems with any of the home deals, Hartwig indicated; it just took time for a home sale to close. They arranged for Hartwig to deposit the proceeds from the home sales into their bank accounts. Those that banked with a different bank had all opened accounts at the Palmdale Wells Fargo branch located next to Hartwig's office and had transferred their funds.

Most of the families had accumulated more furniture than they could possibly fit into the homes they planned to build at *The Ark*. They packed what they planned to take and sold the excess to a used furniture dealer in Lancaster. It seemed that used furniture wasn't worth much and most parted with the excess furniture grudgingly.

Udell and Amy had acquired one of those huge screen monster TV's through Rent-to-Own and the group decided that they would only really need one TV for the settlement. The group paid off the TV for Udell and Amy on the stipulation that it would be housed

in the Common House. Chris had a killer audio setup, as did Ron and Linda. They decided to keep both of those and the day before they left they loaded all of the leftover TV's and everything else on the 5-ton trucks and made their way to the Goodwill store.

They had cleaned out their closets and storage facilities and the trucks were packed. The group began their long trip to Pueblo, traveling as a convoy.

Pueblo Colorado, three days later...

Although the trucker's had wanted to drive straight through, the group persuaded them to lay over each night by agreeing to pay for their fuel, lodging, meals and bar bills in addition to the agreed upon fee they were to be paid for making the haul to Colorado. The latter turned out to be a bargain, the drivers were not a drinking lot, spending most of their free time playing pool and nursing a beer.

As they pulled on to the property, Damon was standing there to greet them. He didn't look any the worse for wear, considering that he had spent several weeks camped out in Colorado during the winter. He had grown a scruffy looking beard and you definitely wanted to stay upwind from him, but all in all he looked fine.

He had even lost the bulge around his middle if Gary was any judge. The truckers parked the trailers where directed and departed. David and Udell agreed to remain on the farm and they all headed to Pueblo. They let Damon drive a vehicle by himself, man, was that boy ripe.

Arriving in Pueblo, they negotiated a group rate with a motel and agreed to meet in an hour in the adjoining restaurant. Arriving at the restaurant, it was after the lunch hour, they persuaded the staff to form a long table from the smaller tables. The young people all took booths and the primary group members sat at the long table.

"Damon," Gary said, "You're a sight for sore eyes. Did you have any trouble?"

"Not really, Dad," Damon replied. "One day a Pueblo county deputy sheriff stopped by. I introduced myself and explained that I was watching the property for my Dad who, together with some friends had recently purchased the property. He copied down some information from my Colorado Driver's license and I referred him to Mr. Brooks and Mr. Jacobs. He seemed to be satisfied.

"A few days later, I was doing some practice firing and some guy with the Forest Service approached me. He gave me a brochure about the National Forest and explained various laws pertaining to the forest. He said that they had a website if we had any additional questions. He was really a nice man, Dad."

"Here is what I think we should do..." Ron began. "First, let's leave Damon and the young people here at the restaurant or at the motel. I think that we should all go get our

Colorado driver's licenses right away. When we're done with that, we will come back here.

"Clarence, why don't you and Fred make the final arrangements for delivery of the building materials and such to the farm? Gary and I will pay a visit to the Sheriff and introduce ourselves; I think that it would be best if we avoid trouble with the local law enforcement if at all possible.

"Tomorrow, Clarence, you can make a run up to Colorado Springs if you think it necessary and confer with that roofing contractor. We will send everyone else down to the farm and have them start gathering rock from the creek and piling it up."

"Ron," Clarence responded, "I'll give the fella in Colorado Springs a call when I get back from arranging the building materials. And, Fred and I will see to the delivery of the water tank, diesel tank and LP tank, too. Chris, why don't you go along with Ron and Gary when they visit the Sheriff? The more of us that he gets to know, the better in my opinion. Tonight, I think that we should all find a store and get everyone a pair of knee-high waterproof boots. From the looks of it, we may be wading mud for a while."

When they had finished lunch, everyone with a California driver's license got into the cars and they all applied for a Colorado Driver's license. When they finished, Fred and Clarence took one vehicle and Chris, Gary and Ron piled into another. The rest of them squeezed into the remaining vehicles and returned to the motel.

Chris, Ron and Gary entered the Sheriff's office. A deputy asked, "May I help you?"

"Yes deputy," Ron said, "We just bought a farm down by Beulah. We were wondering if we could meet the Sheriff and introduce ourselves?"

"Oh," the deputy replied, "You must be those folks from California. Hang on a minute, I'm sure that Sheriff Constantine would like to meet you."

"Gentlemen," the Sheriff said, "I'm Don Constantine, and I've been looking forward to meeting you. One of my deputies met a Damon Olsen a few weeks back. He referred my deputy to Mel Brooks and John Jacobs. I gave Mel and John each a call and they pretty much vouched for you. However, I'm very happy to see you took the time to stop by. I understand you're building an intentional community?"

"Yes, Sheriff" Gary replied, "I'm Gary Olsen, Damon's father. The gentleman on my left is Ron Green and the gentleman to my right is Chris Peoples."

"It's nice to meet you gentlemen," the Sheriff responded, acknowledging each man. "Frankly gentlemen, I've been in office quite a while and I know most of what happens in my community. I heard that you had been making inquiries at one of the local gun stores and that peaked my interest. We don't want some para-military group from California moving into our community."

“Sheriff,” Ron laughed, “You couldn’t be further from the truth. I’ll be candid, we are, in fact a group of people concerned by what we observe happening in the world today. Most of us, at least the principals, are retired or nearing retirement age. Gary’s cousin, a retired farmer from Ft. Collins will be joining our group. His wife, Barb, has been an officer at a bank there in Ft. Collins for a number of years. One of their children lives up in Colorado Springs and the other two in Denver.

“It is true, Sheriff, that we’ve made inquiries about firearms and such. In fact, we will be stopping by that same store later and making a rather substantial purchase. Feel free to join us; we’ve nothing to hide. And, please, visit us at any time. In fact, we would appreciate it if you would have a deputy drive by the farm occasionally. It would make us feel safer.”

“Well,” the Sheriff thought, “Mel and John did vouch for them; and, they seem to be open enough. Still, I’d better keep an eye on them for a while.”

Chapter Twenty-nine – The Sheriff

“Gentlemen,” The Sheriff replied, “I’ll have the deputies who patrol that area swing by the farm from time to time. I appreciate your openness. The Colorado law provides for the issuance of concealed weapons permits by the office of the County Sheriff. I expect that some of you will be applying for concealed weapons permits?”

“No sir,” Ron replied, “That was not our intent. The fella over at the gun store explained the Colorado laws fairly well. I don’t think that we would be needing concealed weapons permits, at least, not at the moment.”

“Did he also explain about NFA weapons?” the Sheriff asked.

“Yes sir,” Ron again replied, “We have no NFA weapons, they and about everything else a man might want are illegal in California. All of our weapons were purchased through California Gun dealers, or, in Damon’s case an Iowa gun dealer. The Iowa laws, or so I am told, are the same as Colorado’s with respect to NFA firearms.”

“I understand that you inquired about SKS’s and a rather substantial quantity of ammunition,” the Sheriff said, laying his cards on the table.

“Yes sir, we did,” Ron continued. “Is that a problem?”

“Not in and of itself,” the Sheriff replied, “However, the SKS isn’t exactly a sporting arm.”

“No sir it’s not,” Ron admitted, “On the other hand, they are inexpensive, as is the ammunition. In fact, a SKS is cheaper than a good .22 rifle or a shotgun. So, we planned to buy a FEW SKS’s since most of us are hobby shooters.”

“I see,” said the Sheriff only half believing Ron’s explanation. “Well good luck on your project, gentlemen, I’ll stop by in a few weeks and see how you’re coming along.”

The men rose, shook hands with the Sheriff and left.

“Ron!” Chris hissed as they got into the car, “Why didn’t you just tell him your shorts size while you were at it?”

“Yeah Ron,” Gary added, “You were just a fountain of information!”

“Boys,” Ron replied, “That Sheriff has obviously been checking us out and is concerned. I mean, if you were the Sheriff and a group of 40 people, more or less, moved into your County, wouldn’t you be concerned? My daddy always told me that the best defense was a good offense. Besides, what would he have thought when he found out that we had just purchased several SKS rifles and a whole lot of ammunition?”

“I see your point Ron,” Chris replied, “But, I’m not sure if I agree with you or not.”

“The same goes for me, too” Gary announced.

“Let’s get back to the motel and see how Clarence and Fred made out,” Ron suggested.

They returned to the motel. Ron stopped by the restaurant to see what time would be best for their group to come in for dinner. The folks at the restaurant said before 5 pm or after 7:30 pm. He went from door to door advising the congregation, as he’d begun to think of them, that dinner would be at 7:30 pm.

They assembled at the restaurant just after 7:30 pm and had just placed their orders when the Sheriff walked in and laid his hat on the counter.

“Sheriff!” Ron smiled, rising to greet the Sheriff, “Let me introduce you to most of the members of our community.”

Ron took pains to introduce every member of the group to the Sheriff. Occasionally, Ron stumbled on a name, getting David and Lorrie’s kids all mixed up. When all of the introductions were completed, Ron invited the Sheriff to join them for dinner. That earned him a glance or two from Gary and Chris.

“I don’t want to intrude,” the Sheriff replied to the invitation.

“Nonsense,” Ron insisted, “Sit down and eat. This is the best chance you’ll ever have to get to know us.”

The Sheriff sat and quickly placed an order. Ron went around the table, adding information about each person. He began with himself, indicating that he was disabled due to a heart attack and that he had been a manager at a propane company previously.

He gave the Sheriff a sketchy bio of each of the ten principal members of the group. Of course, he left out anything that might give the Sheriff any reason for concern. When he got to Jan, Ron indicated that she was expecting her first child and in a few months, they would have a Colorado native included in their group.

Having met all but two of the Californians, the Sheriff relaxed a little. Ron went on to explain that the principals were from Acton, California and had more or less known each other for years.

He went on to say that California used to be a nice place to live, but with the gang violence and other things, the group had decided that it was time to move to the Midwest. As they ate, the Sheriff apparently concluded that these weren't bad people and he could certainly understand their wanting to get away from California and the violence. He thanked them from dinner, rose and left.

“They seem like nice folks,” he mused.

The party broke up and everyone headed to his or her room.

The next morning, Pueblo, CO, 8:30 am...

The group assembled for breakfast, taking their time, realizing that a lot of hard work lay ahead of them. After checking out of the motel, Ron and Gary stayed in Pueblo and the remainder of the group headed for the farm. Gary and Ron headed for the gun store. When they arrived, they sat in the car and counted out loud.

"I'll need 8 rifles," Ron said, "Two for Jennifer and her husband, two for Brenda and her husband, one for Kevin, two for Paula and her husband in case they change their minds and one extra to be sure."

"I'll need 8, too," Gary explained, "6 for David and Lorrie and 2 for Amy and Udell."

"Are you going to buy Udell a rifle?" Ron asked, "If I recall, he's a convicted felon."

"He is that," Gary readily admitted, "But I won't tell him I'm buying him a rifle, I'll just loan him MY SKS so he can learn to shoot it."

"Chris and Patti will need 1 rifle for Matt," Ron said. "I think that about covers the bases."

"Well," Gary added, "I have no idea what John and Barb have for weapons. Do you suppose that we ought to buy some for them?"

"No," Ron quickly replied, "Your cousin will probably have ideas of his own; and, it might put him off if we presume to arm him and his family. Barb and he will be here in a few days, why don't we let them take care of it when they arrive?"

"Ok," Gary assented, "That makes a total of 17 rifles. Aw, what the hell, I'll buy one spare and make it an even number, 18."

Ron had a pad in his hand and he wrote down '18 Rifles'.

"Now, Ron asked, "What about magazines?"

"Ronald," Gary chided his friend, "The SKS has an internal magazine."

"Right, it slipped my mind." Ron mumbled sheepishly. "Ammo?"

"What's the matter with you?" Gary asked.

"What do you mean?" Ron replied.

“Way back when, Ron,” Gary answered, “It was you with all of the ideas about ammo and such. Are you losing your mind?”

“Maybe I am partner, maybe I am,” Ron admitted “There just been so much going on...”

“Ok,” Gary said, “I’m sorry Ron. Look, except for the flechettes and double aught buck, let’s just assume for a moment that we don’t have any ammunition. You said 5,000 rounds of .308 and 5,000 rounds of .223 per rifle; write down 10,000 rounds of 30-06 for the Garand’s, 20,000 rounds of .308 ball, 5,000 rounds of .308 match, 35,000 rounds of .223, SS109/M855 if available, otherwise, M193 ball and 90,000 rounds of 7.62x39mm. Then, write down 50 bricks of hyper velocity .22, 50 bricks of the high velocity .22 and 5 bricks of the standard velocity .22. Write down 7 cases each of 12-gauge, #6 shot, #2 shot, #4 buck and rifled slugs.

“What about handgun ammo?” Ron asked.

Well,” Gary said, “Starting with my .32 auto, we need 4 boxes of .32 auto, 6,000 rounds of 9 mil...”

“Wait a minute,” Ron said, “Linda, Fred, Damon, Derek, Mary; that’s only 5,000 rounds of 9mil!”

“No, 6000,” Gary laughed, “Udell has a 9 mil.”

“Geezuz!” Ron muttered, “We have an ex-con in our group who owns a handgun! Well, what brand of gun does he have?”

“I have no idea,” Gary laughed again, “All I can tell you is that one night he came over, drunk, and admitted that he had a 9mm handgun. Hell, I don’t even know if he really does, but we had better assume that he was telling the truth. To continue, we need 4,000 rounds of .357, 1,000 rounds of .44 mag, and 2,000 rounds of .45 auto.”

“Do you think the guy will sell us that much?” Ron asked.

“Hell, I have no idea,” Gary replied, “I don’t even know if he has that much ammo in stock. Let’s go in and talk to the guy.”

“Oh hi, you’re the guys from California,” the owner greeted them as they entered the store.

“Not any longer,” Ron replied, “We moved to Colorado.”

“Really?” the storeowner said. “If I remember right, you fellas bought some .308, some .223 and some 9mm; is that right?”

“Yes, for my son,” Gary remarked. “You also filled us in pretty well on the Colorado gun

laws, if you'll remember.”

“Hmm...” the owner continued, “That I did. As I recall, you fellas seemed awfully interested in my SKS's.”

“Still are,” Ron stated. “By the way, we've already spoken to Sheriff Constantine and told him we'd be making a substantial purchase of guns and ammo.”

“Well then, what can I do for you boys? By the way, my name is Carson, you can call me Kit,” Kit said.

Ron handed the list to Kit, saying, “Now don't have a heart attack there partner.”

Kit scanned the list, his eyes bugging out when he got to the line, “90,000 7.62x39mm.”

“Fellas,” Kit said, “I assume you'd want the Russian ammo on 10 round stripper clips for the SKS rifles?”

“Certainly,” Ron answered. “I noticed your reaction, is there a problem?”

“Well. Frankly yes,” Kit responded. “Would you fellas mind waiting a minute while I check my stock?”

Kit entered the back room and quickly went to his office. He dialed a number from memory.

“Constantine,” the voice answered.

“Don, this is Kit over at the gun store. A couple of those guys from California are here and they want 18 SKS's and over 100,000 rounds of ammo in various calibers,” Kit hurriedly babbled.

“Kit, I called over and got their social security numbers that they gave when they applied for their Colorado driver's licenses. I ran an NCIC check on the guys and they come back clean. Go ahead and get them started filling out paperwork and I be right over.” Don replied.

As Ron and Gary labored over the forms, the Sheriff entered the gun store.

“Morning Ron. Morning Gary,” the Sheriff said. “Come to make that substantial purchase you mentioned to me yesterday?”

“Yes sir,” Ron answered, “Is there a problem?”

“No, not really,” Don answered, “But you sure do have Kit excited, I can tell you that.”

“But Sheriff,” Ron began to protest.

“Ron, I checked out you men on the NCIC computer and you come back clean. Gary apparently had a concealed weapons permit back in Iowa a number of years ago,” Don began, “He passed the Scott County Sheriff’s class and everything. Would you mind, in the spirit of openness, explaining why you fellas want so many guns and so much ammunition? We can go back to Kit’s office.”

The men carefully outlined whom each weapon was intended for. They went on to explain that while they had each brought a basic set of firearms back in California, they hadn’t purchased any ammunition. Ron went on to explain that they wanted 5,000 rounds for each center fire rifle and 1,000 rounds for each handgun.

Ron looked at Don and said, “Sheriff, we would have purchased all of our ammunition before we left California including the ammo for the SKS rifles and we would have purchased the SKS rifles one or two at a time if we had anything to hide. We have nothing to hide and we did not do that. Moreover, we checked in with you yesterday and introduced ourselves without being asked.

“Sheriff, Don, is that the behavior you’d expect from some para-military group? We introduced you to the entire group except for Gary’s two son-in-laws who stayed to keep a watch on the farm. Oh, and one more thing that we didn’t mention, there is a family who will be joining us soon from Iowa. His name is Herb Johnson and he has the contract to reload the ammo for the DMPD. Call and check on Herb, too, if you really think it is necessary.”

“Now Ron, don’t get yourself worked up,” Don replied, “Everything you’ve just said is true. I have no problem with your purchase of the rifles. However, Kit has to be careful, surely you must understand that. Besides,” he chuckled, “I don’t think that Kit has sold that much ammo in all the years he’s been in business. Go ahead and make your purchase. I’m sure that Kit will probably have to order a lot of the ammo for you. When you’re done, I think I’ll ride down to Beulah with you and get a look at this farm of yours. Do you mind?”

“Hell no Don,” Ron replied, “We said that you were welcome anytime and we meant it. You want to stop by the office and pick up a couple of deputies?” Ron said as he winked at the Sheriff.

Don laughed out loud at that question. Although he’d just met these people the previous afternoon, he had to admit that he was beginning to like them. The men completed their purchases. Much of the ammo had to be ordered, but Kit assured them that it would be there in a few days. He even offered to deliver the ammo. All in all it was a thoroughly satisfactory morning and perhaps the men had made a new friend.

Chapter Thirty – The Ark

In the car, returning to Beulah from Pueblo...

“Gary,” Ron began, “Whatever became of that 7’ gel cell and UPS? I know we didn’t load it.”

“Ron,” Gary replied, “I went up to Lancaster to buy it, but another Internet Provider had already bought it from the guy. I guess that I forgot to mention it.”

“And,” Ron continued, “Can you believe the Sheriff? I would have expected him to have a fit over the quantities of weapons and ammo we bought.”

“He took me aside for a moment and told me that I could have a concealed weapons permit whenever I wanted it,” Gary responded. “At the moment, that’s the least of our concerns.”

“What do you mean partner?” Ron asked.

“We’ve been mighty lucky so far...” Gary responded, “Everything has gone our way. Oh, we’ve had to change course a couple of times, but what are the odds...”

Ron turned into the farm, the Sheriff right behind him. They got out of the car and motioned for some of the boys to come unload the ammo. They would have to wait to pick up the guns in a few days. They noticed that the area was a sea of mud. Guess it had been a good idea to buy all of those boots. They had, in fact, had to go to 3 stores before they found enough for everyone. They noticed that the food had all been loaded into one of the 40’ containers and that Clarence was busy driving stakes and stringing lines for the layout of their new compound.

Ron directed the boys to load the ammo in the half filled container, which contained some of their household goods. The Sheriff, he noticed, had donned a pair of rubber galoshes and was walking to meet them. Chris was up on the windmill and had removed the damaged vanes and was removing one good vane, apparently for a pattern.

“Fellas,” Don said as he approached them, “If what I see is any indication, you folks are going to be squared away in no time.”

“Don,” Gary laughed, “We’ve had more dumb luck than you could ever imagine.”

Clarence joined the men. “Well, I’ve got it all staked out,” he said. “I arranged the homes in a square with the Common Building in the center. John has finished delivering his farm equipment and, did you notice, we have a Ford tractor with a backhoe. So, I thought that we would go ahead and start digging the footings for the foundations.”

Gary glanced over at the parked farm equipment, and did a double take. There it sat,

Darwin's Dad's old Ford NAA tractor with the backhoe. And, the posthole auger lay on the ground next to it. He just shook his head in utter amazement.

"Good luck fellas," Don said, "Gary, you stop in the office when you can and we'll take care of that matter I mentioned. I'll be seeing you fellas." Don got in his car and left.

That afternoon, a semi tractor-trailer rig stopped out on the road. It contained several large bundles. Ron drove up to the road, parked and got out.

"Can I help you?" he asked the driver.

"I have a delivery here for a Mr. Ronald Green," the driver stated.

"Oh? I'm Ron Green, Who is the delivery from?" Ron asked.

"It's from a company name Atlantic Orient," the driver replied.

Ron could barely contain his excitement. "I love it when a plan comes together," he thought. He directed the driver to pull his rig back to the area where they were building the homes. Using the loader mounted on the old NAA Ford tractor, they managed to get the truck unloaded and the driver sent on his way.

"Gary," Ron said, "Call Herb and tell him that the wind turbines have arrived. Suggest that he fly out of Des Moines to Denver and take a commuter flight to Pueblo. And Gary," Ron urged, "Ask him to get here as soon as possible."

Six weeks later...

The folks all assembled in the recently completed Common Building. Most of the homes were finished except for the roofs. The gas lines, sewer lines and water lines had been buried. Herb had flown in, and in just under 3 weeks, had managed to assemble the 82' towers, mount the generators and complete the electrical installation. It had been a Herculean task completed at break neck speed. Other than one broken arm, which occurred when one of the boys had slipped and fallen about 15' from one of the towers, the whole project had gone without a hitch.

"I hereby call this first official meeting of *The Ark Homeowners Association* to order," Ron announced.

"Clarence, could you give a report on the building progress?" Ron asked.

"Ron, folks," Clarence began "As most of you know, the houses are done and about half are shingled with those fancy shingles. Frankly, I've never seen a housing tract go up as fast as this one. Of course, most housing tracts aren't erected on a dawn to dusk basis. We're up to over 11 hours of daylight per day. We had a bit of trouble with the slip form construction at first, but we learned rapidly.

“John and Barb’s families came down on the weekends and pitched in, so we had a little extra help. The contractor tells me that he will be done with the shingles by the end of the week. Usually, it takes 3-4 days to shingle a house, but he hired a couple of sub-contractors and they have a crew on every one of the five homes. Not having a plumber aboard, I took it upon myself to hire a plumbing contractor from Pueblo to do the plumbing. We only had half of the wood stoves we need, so we picked some up in Pueblo.”

“Speaking of plumbers,” Ron continued, “Gary have you talked to Mary lately? When will Derek be home on leave?”

“He arrives in Des Moines Saturday evening,” Gary replied.

“Good,” Ron acknowledged.

“Thanks for the report Clarence,” Ron said, “Do you have anything to add?”

Clarence shook his head.

“Chris you did a bang up job on fabricating new blades for the windmill thanks.” Ron continued. “John, how is the farm work going?”

“I thought that I was done riding a tractor,” John laughed. It’s took me a whole month to plow, disk and rake. I should finish planting tomorrow. You ladies can go ahead and start planting your garden, too. I marked out 5 acres for you to use. Tell you one thing, I’ve never planted sunflowers before; that was a real experience.”

“How much acreage did you plant in each crop, John?” Ron asked.

“Well, 300 acres of sunflowers,” John replied, “40 acres of wheat; 40 acres of corn, 20 acres of oats, and the rest in alfalfa. There’s a livestock auction on Saturday, I think I’ll drive on over and see about picking up some cattle, sows and goats.”

“Don’t forget to get a few head of sheep,” Jan interrupted.

“Gawd I hate sheep,” John mumbled half under his breath, “Ok Jan.”

“Thanks John,” Ron continued, “Gary, what about communications?”

“Ron, I picked up a used phone system from an office being remodeled in Pueblo.” Gary began. “We put a phone in each house, but we only installed 3 lines. It was an old Tie 1232 system in perfect working order. Back in ’83, I installed a similar system in the office in LA. It drug up a lot of old memories. I got it installed without a hitch, but I had one hell of a time programming it.

“Of course that means that we will have to have someone on duty 24/7 to take incoming calls. I suggest that we put the main console in the security office. Before you ask, the console is a small box, which attaches to what would be the receptionist’s phone in a regular office. It has a button for each extension, which lights if that extension is off the hook. To connect a call, the receptionist presses the appropriate button and announces the call. It is simplicity itself.”

“As far as radios go,” he continued, “I received my renewed license a week after I applied. It said that my license had been converted per 97.21a3. I went online and, I could be wrong on this, it appears that according to section 97.301, I am allowed to operate on more frequencies than on the original license. I didn’t have time to check with a Ham Operator, so I’m not sure. To continue, I picked up enough extra 40-channel SSB radios to put one in each home and one in each vehicle. I also added several GMRS/FRS radios; we have enough for everyone plus several spares.

“I set my Yaesu up in the small communications shack here in this building next to the security office. I also added a GMRS/FRS base station and a 40-channel SSB radio. Installed every single radio in a makeshift Faraday cage and I advise everyone to keep all of their handheld radios in a metal box when they are not in use. Oh, I also put a 40-channel SSB base station in the security office as well as a GMRS/FRS base station. It might be overkill, but you never know. Anyway, as soon as the roofers finish, we will mount the ground plane antennas on the rest of the homes. I think that that covers it.”

“Thanks Gary,” Ron continued. “Fred, how are we doing on the medical front?”

“I set up an examining room and a four bed ward,” Fred responded, “I had to use folding cots, but that shouldn’t present a huge problem. Since it’s next to the security office, I installed the narcotics cabinet in the security office. We’ve been lucky so far; we had some cuts, a few scrapes and only the one broken bone. Fortunately, it was a simple fracture and I managed to set the bone and cast it without problem.”

“Ok, thanks Fred,” Ron continued. “For the moment I think we can get by with having a single person in the security office 24/7. I’ll put a signup sheet on the bulletin board and those of you interested can sign up. You know, we should not have gotten rid of all of the TV’s. We’re going to have to pick up something cheap in Pueblo. I think that we should have a TV running 24/7 in the security office to keep abreast of current events.”

“Linda and I received the money from the sale of our home,” He continued, “Has everyone received the money from the sale of their homes?”

Everyone who was selling a home nodded.

“Ok then,” Ron continued, “I like to suggest the following. Chris, you make a run into Pueblo and pick up some scrap 1” plate; you know what I mean, the stuff that they use to cover holes in the road when they’re doing construction. If you can’t get it in Pueblo, go to Colorado Springs and if you can’t get it there, drive on up to Denver.”

“What do you want that for Ron, and how much do you want?” Chris asked.

“Chris, I want you to build shutters for every window out of the plate,” Ron explained. “Take some measurements, or, better yet, get with Clarence. He can probably tell you exactly how much we need.”

Well, ok,” Chris responded, “Clarence, see me after the meeting. “

The meeting continued well into the night. Gary pointed out that he had DSL Internet access on one phone line. Since his router had 4 ports and his switch was an 8-port switch, he had only found it necessary to add a 4-port hub for his networked printers, which were also located in the security office. Extra pains had been taken to protect their entire installation against EMP, he assured them.

When the subject of EMP came up, they discussed it at some length and decided that they had better enclose the diesel generator and the generators on the wind turbines as well as the computer controller in makeshift Faraday cages. After further discussion, it was also agreed that they would lay in an ample supply of parts for the diesel pickups that all had traded their autos in for. Everyone was bone tired, but they pressed on until every issue was resolved.

The next morning, Tuesday, 8 am, at The Ark...

Ron, Gary and Clarence were sitting in the security office drinking coffee.

“You know partner, it just seems like I’m overlooking something,” Ron said, looking at Gary. “Hell it seems like I am overlooking several something’s.”

“Well Ron,” Clarence responded, “I can think of a couple or three things to talk about. I think that you had better get on the phone to those wind turbine folks and order some spare parts. You know, bearings, replacement generator coils, maybe a spare turbine blade.

“And, there is one thing that we have neglected to do, for sure. Way back when, we talked about putting all of our funds into precious metals; now that everyone has the funds from the sale of their homes and has paid into the Homeowner’s Association, I expect it’s time to take care of that. We need to get up to Denver and take care of that. One more thing, we need to get everyone to practicing with those rifles.”

“You’re absolutely right about each and every one of those things, Clarence,” Ron acknowledged, “But that isn’t it.”

“I think I’ll call and check on Mary and the kids,” Gary commented in passing.

“That’s it!” Ron shouted.

“That’s what?” Clarence and Gary asked together.

“Your mention of Mary made me realize what’s bothering me.” Ron replied, “Call Herb and see how close he and June are to moving out here.”

Chapter Thirty-one – Gold Train

Later that morning...

Linda, Lucy, Patti, Sharon and Jan got into two of the pickups and left *The Ark*.

"I sure hope that they don't have any trouble," Gary said.

"Partner, who in the hell would ever expect a bunch of tough looking ladies like them to be carrying a shipment of Gold and Silver," Ron snorted.

"Still, I don't like it!" Gary responded.

"Tell you what partner," Ron said, "I'll call Linda on her cell phone. I'll tell her that you and I will catch up to them in Denver. Meanwhile, why don't you and I go see Don?"

Gary assented and 45-minutes later, they were sitting in the Sheriff's office.

"What can I do for you boys today?" Don asked.

"Don," Gary began, "I'd like to go ahead and get that concealed weapons permit if it would be ok with you. And, do you suppose that you could see your way clear to issuing one to Ron?"

"No problem fellas," Don smiled, "I had expected you in sooner."

"There's one more thing, Don," Gary continued, "Our wives are on their way to Denver to convert most of our funds to Gold and Silver. Would it be too much to ask, I mean, do you suppose that you could arrange an escort for them with the Highway Patrol?"

"How much money are we talking about here fellas?" Don asked.

"Well Don, I'm not sure," Ron ventured, "But I expect nearly 7 figures."

"SEVEN FIGURES, HOLY LIVING HELL, HAVE YOU GUYS LOST YOUR MINDS?" Don screamed at them.

The Chief Deputy stuck his head in the door, "Everything ok Sheriff?"

"Bill, come in and shut the door," Don replied evenly. "These gentlemen ask for and I agreed to issue them conceal weapons permits. Get their prints and issue the permits immediately. It seems that their wives are on the way to Denver to buy a million dollars' worth of Gold and Silver. I'm going to get on the phone to the State Patrol and arrange an escort for the women on their return trip from Denver. I am also going to call..."

"Sheriff?" Bill interrupted, "Wouldn't it make more sense for them to arrange for an ar-

mored car to transport the Gold and Silver?”

“Bill, I should have thought of that,” the Sheriff replied, “In fact, you two yard birds should have thought of that.”

Ron and Gary were embarrassed, the Sheriff was right, they SHOULD have thought of an armored car.

“And where, if I might ask,” the Sheriff continued, “Do you plan to store all of that Gold and Silver?”

“Don, would you and your family like to join us Friday night?” Ron asked. “We’re having our first barbeque of the year and we would love to have you folks join us. Besides, I, we, would like you to take a look at all we’ve accomplished.”

“I’ll ask my wife,” Don replied. “In the meantime, you fellas go with Bill and get your permits. And, gentlemen, the next time you are going to do something stupid, do you suppose that you could run it by me first?”

The week passed quickly. Chris had returned late Tuesday night with the 5-ton truck laden with metal plating. He and Matt had been working around the clock fabricating shutters for the windows. In fact, Chris had intentionally over bought plating and they also fashioned a shutter for each door.

The roofers had finished and Gary had installed a Radio Shack ground plane antenna on each home. At Ron’s suggestion, they had dug into the hill on the other side of the creek and had somehow managed to push, shove and tug the 3 containers into the area that they had managed to dig out.

They had laid gravel for the containers to sit on and Clarence had a whole group of the young people slapping tar on the containers. They even tilted them and painted the bottoms with tar. After the containers were in place, they laid several layers of waterproof tarps over the tops of the containers and filled all of the spaces with gravel. Chris had just enough plating to fashion 1” plate doors for the 3 containers.

The ladies prepared a grand feast and the men merrily barbequed steaks, chops, chickens, pork steaks, hamburgers and hot dogs. They had sodas, a pony keg, lemonade, iced tea, and chips of all kinds. There was, one had to admit, enough food to feed a small army. And from one perspective, that’s what they represented, a small army.

“Sheriff, we’re so glad that you and your family could make it,” Ron cheerfully greeted the Sheriff.

“Ron, I’d like you to meet my wife, Myrna, and our children, Don Jr. and Susan,” Don said introducing the members of his family to Ron.

Ron called Linda over and introduced her to Don and his family. She took Myrna and the children in tow and began to make the rounds introducing them to everyone. The teenagers soon split off from their mother and joined the other teens that were sitting in a group. Ron gave Don a guided tour of the facilities. Don had to admit to himself that he was impressed. "These folks sure have accomplished a lot in a short time," he thought to himself.

"Tell me Ron, Where did you stash all of the Gold and Silver?" Don asked.

"Don, do you remember the lay of the old farm place that burned down?" Ron asked.

"Sort of..." Don replied.

"Do you remember where the basement was?" Ron continued.

"I'd place it somewhere under this building, Ron," Don replied.

"Well, my friend, it still is!" Ron smiled.

"You folks have done all right by yourselves," he commented. "Suppose I could have a glass of that beer now, Ron?"

Ron laughed, "Let's go partner. There are a lot of folks looking forward to seeing you again."

As the expression goes, "a good time was had by all." The party continued until nearly 10 pm, Don and his family leaving about 9. As the party wound down, some of the men gathered in the Common Building, watching CNN. The announcer was talking about the forthcoming election in the fall. Apparently President Bush continued to drop in popularity and Kerry was the leading candidate for the Democrat party.

Dean had finally dropped out of the race and the two leading candidates were Kerry and Edwards, in that order. Of course, Al Sharpton was hanging on to the bitter end and the Reverend Jesse Jackson was out stumping for him trying to put together, or strengthen, whatever the case might be, the Rainbow Coalition. The new Governor of California was having his problems, too. It seemed that maybe Arnold was a little longer on talk than he was on accomplishment.

Tomorrow would be the first true full day of rest for the group. All they had left to accomplish was to hook up the electricity in the five homes that the roofers had finished earlier that day and the homestead would be complete. Come the first of the week, they would begin construction of the proposed barn/machine shed. Good thing, too, if John came back with a load of livestock from the auction. They would need to get the machinery and livestock sheltered.

Gary commented how, back in 1961 when he was stationed at Lowry AFB in Denver, it had snowed on Labor Day and closed all of the passes. They had, he said, resorted to tearing down the little white picket fences and used them as kindling for the furnaces.

Fortunately for the group, they had gotten a permit and had gathered a substantial supply of wood from the National Forest. It wasn't enough to see them through a winter, but it was a good start.

Saturday morning...

John stopped by Ron's and picked up a substantial amount of the remaining cash on hand. Together with the money he already had, they would load up on livestock today. Ron, for his part, took his coffee and joined some of the men in the Common Building. They had on a Busch Series car race. Chris and Matt were glued to the set. He stopped by the small office Gary called his radio shack and greeted his friend. He then moved on to the security office and sat down by Clarence. Clarence had the TV tuned in to the Fox Channel and didn't even notice Ron enter the room.

"Morning Clarence," Ron said, startling Clarence.

"Good morning Ron," Clarence replied cheerfully, "You know Ron, I just don't like it, there's something going on."

"What do you mean, my friend?" Ron asked.

"Well..." Clarence began, "There's still the war in Iraq, of course; I can't tell if we are winning or losing. The death toll is rapidly approaching 1,000. And Iran and North Korea are still refusing to let the UN Inspectors in. But it's not that. I can't put my finger on it."

"What's happening in Israel?" Ron inquired.

"Same old crap," Clarence laughed, "The Palestinians bomb something in Israel; the Israelis roll the tanks or send up their helicopter guns ships. You know, now that you mention it there hasn't been a bombing in about 10 days. I just don't know what to think."

"Clarence, do you feel like going for a walk?" Ron asked.

"Sure Ron," Clarence replied, "What do you have in mind?"

"Oh nothing special Clarence," Ron answered, "It's just that we've been here almost 7 weeks and I haven't had a chance to walk over to the National Forest. I'd like to get the lay of the land, you know. What say we grab some of the leftovers and go for a hike?"

The men set out about 10 minutes later. They walked for about 2½ hours and stopped to eat their lunch. They had seen a lot of wildlife as they walked deer mostly. Clarence said he was starting to get tired and suggested that now would be a good time to head

back home. Ron wanted to continue, but admitted that he too wasn't used to so much walking. They turned to home and arrived back at the compound around 3 pm. John was directing the unloading of 3 trailers filled with livestock. He motioned the men over.

"How did you make out John?" Ron asked.

"Ron, Clarence," John began, I picked up 15 dairy cows, a bull, 50 head of sheep, about a dozen goats, 40 feeder cattle, mostly calves, and a dozen sows and a boar. Since we don't have any hay, yet, I also bought a truckload of baled alfalfa. Hey, there's the truck now, excuse me fellas, I've got to show him where to unload the hay."

John returned a few minutes later. "While I was at it, I stopped by the feed store and ordered a truck load of feed. And, look over there," he pointed.

Ron and Clarence looked to where John was pointing. There were several large cardboard cartons with holes in them. They walked over and pulled the lid off one of the boxes. There were several young chickens in the box.

"Late hatch," John said. "Normally you wouldn't find chickens this late, but I got talking to a fella at the auction and he mentioned that a lady south of Pueblo had lost her husband. Matter of fact, those are his dairy cows. Anyways, he said that she was moving to town and wasn't sure what ta do with the chickens she'd bought. I got directions from him and went ta see the lady. Offered her a fair price and by Gawd, we have chickens."

"John, you've been busy!" Ron commented.

"Yah and I'm plumb worn out," John said. "Clarence, do ya suppose ya could throw together some chicken coops real fast like? Wouldn't do to keep them chickens boxed up too long, they'll start killin each other."

"I'll get right on it, John," Clarence replied.

A couple of hours later, Clarence came into the Common Building and flopped in a chair. "Well, I got them cooped, more or less," he said.

Just then, CNN interrupted its programming with a special announcement. *Ladies and Gentlemen*, Judy what's her name said, *We are getting reports of nuclear explosions in the Middle East. We go live now to the White House where the President is about to address the nation.*

The screen cut to the Oval office. A somewhat disheveled President stepped up to the podium.

My fellow Americans, he began. An aide walked up to the President, handed him a piece of paper and whispered in his ear.

WHAT? the President shouted. *ARE YOU SU...*

Suddenly, the screen was filled with snow...

Chapter Thirty-two – TSHTF

“What the flip?” Ron cursed.

“Well, what in the hell is going on?” Ron asked.

“Hey Ron, come here!” someone shouted from the main room, “The TV is back on.”

Ron hurried to the main room. Judy Woodruff, yeah, that was her name was speaking.

To repeat, early indications are that a small nuclear device detonated near the White House. She said. We are being advised that the Israelis have dropped nuclear weapons on Tehran, Cairo, Riyadh, and Damascus.

The screen cut to Wolf Blitzer. *CNN has just learned that North Korea launched a missile carrying a nuclear warhead on Seoul, South Korea. We have no further information at this time.*

The screen returned to Judy Woodruff. Ron listened for a few moments, decided that she was just repeating herself and returned to the radio shack.

“Gary, I’m just guessing that Washington might be an isolated incident, why don’t you get that Ham rig going and see if you can find out anything.”

“I’ll let you know if I hear anything Ron,” he said not looking up.

Ron returned to the main room. In a soft voice, he said, “Get everyone together here in the main room. Make it in 30 minutes. Amy, why don’t you go into the security office and monitor the TV in there? Someone turn that dang box off,” he said gesturing to the large screen TV.

“Dang,” he said, wadding up the empty cigarette pack, “Anybody got a smoke?”

Ron dropped into a chair, took the offered cigarette, lit it and leaned back. “I gotta get a grip,” he thought, his mind racing. He thought he heard a phone ring in the background.

“Uncle Ron,” Amy called, “Phone.”

“Ron Green,” he spoke into the phone.

“Ron, Herb,” Herb greeted him, “Are you watching TV?”

“Yes,” Ron replied, “Do you have any idea what’s going on?”

“Derek and Mary got home from the airport about a half hour ago, so tell Gary that they are ok,” Herb said. “I don’t know any more than that, but I think that Derek does. Any-

way, we're bugging out. If we drive straight through and don't have any problems, we will be there in 17 or 18 hours.

"Derek and Mary are loading their truck and I have everything from my basement loaded on my trailer. I just need to swing by the shop, load my equipment and supplies and then we'll hit the road. See you in a few hours." Herb hung up.

Ron hung up the phone and walked over to the radio shack. "Heard anything yet partner?" he asked.

"Not really, it's pretty confused at the moment." Gary replied.

"That was Herb on the phone; he said to tell you that Derek and Mary were home from the airport and that all of them would be bugging out in about an hour. He also said that if they didn't have any trouble, they would be here in 18 hours."

Everyone was assembled in the main room when Ron entered. He quickly recapped what little he knew of the situation and asked for comments. There weren't many comments. Questions, sure, but not many comments. It occurred to Ron that he might calm the folks if he recapped their situation here at *The Ark*.

"At the moment," Ron began, "We don't really know what is going on. Herb and Derek are on their way here with their families at the moment. Let me recap the situation as I see it."

"1. After John finished planting," he continued, "I had the large diesel tank filled to about half full. I also had the LP tank topped off. So, we have about 15,000 gallons of diesel and 5,000 gallons of LP. That should last us for a while. And we did put in that small gasoline tank holding 300 gallons and it is nearly full."

"2. We received the spare parts for the Wind Turbines and if we have a problem, Herb should be able to repair them."

"3. On the way to Denver, some of the ladies got to talking and they decided to only invest half of the funds in precious metals, so we have plenty of cash on hand. Shelia didn't go with them and still has all of her funds in the bank."

"4. I was thinking of driving down to New Mexico tomorrow and loading up on cigarettes at one of the reservations, but, I guess I'll have to rethink that." Ron said chuckling.

"The main thing that I want to emphasize is that we need to avoid hasty action," Ron continued. "In a TSHTF situation, the most common thing that most people do is over react. I doubt that most folks in the area even know we're here. It's true that we may have been a little too open with some of what we've done, but it is hard to say just yet whether or not that is going to come back to haunt us."

“In the meantime, I would like to suggest that we calm down, assess our situation and act accordingly. Lyn. If you and the other ladies could inventory what we have in terms of supplies and make a list of our needs, I’d really appreciate it. Gary, Clarence, Chris, Fred, and John, I think that we should visit about our security concerns. May I suggest that the rest of you turn in?”

And, turn in they did, although few slept that night. Linda and the other women took stock of the foodstuffs and the like. The men gathered and concluded that they should establish roving patrols around their perimeter. After much discussion, it was decided that one of them would staff the security office and that they would have three pickups circling the farm at irregular intervals keeping an eye out for trouble. They worked out a temporary schedule and Fred was delegated to assemble the people selected for the first watch.

Sunday, 9 am, The Ark...

Most everyone had gathered in the Common Building, dubbed ‘Central’ by someone. They sat and watched the news being broadcast by CNN. It was slowly becoming clear that the US, indeed the world, was in trouble. The Vice-President had been sworn in as President. He had immediately issued orders recalling all US troops to the US. A massive airlift was underway, but it would take time to get all of the troops home.

Fighting had broken out in Iraq on a massive scale and our troops were being forced into a fighting withdrawal towards the Persian Gulf. Thousands of American troops had been killed in the various nuclear exchanges, some in Riyadh, and a lot in Korea. Pakistan had launched a nuclear attack on India and India had retaliated in kind. It seemed however, that Russia, China and the US had avoided being drawn into the exchanges, so far.

Linda summarized the supply situation. “Actually, we’re in pretty good shape. We need paper products, mostly TP and feminine supplies. We hadn’t been storing much flour since it doesn’t keep very well. We’ve made a list of what we conclude should be added to round out our larder to cover a full year or more,” she concluded handing the list to her husband.

Ron looked at the list unable to suppress a laugh. “There you go Gary, Charmin is at the top of the list.”

“It is difficult to know what the situation is in Pueblo. I would speculate that the people panicked and there has been a run on the grocery stores. I’ll get on the phone in a little while and give the Sheriff’s Department a call. Clarence, how are we fixed on building materials? Do we have enough to erect guard towers around the property?”

“Ron, we can’t build many towers,” Clarence stated, “We only bought a small amount of building supplies in excess of what we needed to complete the compound. I suppose that we could use the Aspens for building materials, what did you have in mind?”

"I'm not sure Clarence," Ron replied, "I was just fishing for ideas. I suppose that at the minimum, we ought to erect a tower every half-mile. That would mean 8 towers. I remember reading somewhere, no wait; it was something I saw on the History Channel.

"The French and Germans built fixed fortifications before WW II. The Germans outflanked the French fortifications and the allies managed to bust through the German line without all that much difficulty. When I think about it, we don't really have enough people to properly man 8 towers. How about four, one at each corner of the property for a start? We can make adjustments as dictated by the situation."

"I can handle that Ron," Clarence acknowledged.

"Good!" Ron smiled. "Now depending upon what's happening, I think that we should try to get a second diesel tank and another LP tank. It may be difficult getting them filled, but I think that we should try. Why don't we break for now and I'll call Don."

"I get started on those towers right away." Clarence advised selecting several of the teenagers to assist him.

Ron went to the security office and called the Sheriff's office. The Sheriff was busy and couldn't come to the phone. After a few minutes on hold, Bill came on the line.

"Ron how are you folks doing down there?" Bill asked.

"We're fine Bill, thanks for asking," Ron replied, "I was calling to find out the situation in Pueblo."

"I'll be quick Ron," Bill said, "It's starting to calm down. We had a run on the grocery stores last night and some looting. We reacted swiftly and have it under control for the moment."

"Bill, we're pretty well set down here," Ron continued, "But we could use a few supplies. The reason I called was to see what you would suggest about our coming into Pueblo to get those supplies."

"Ron, I'd hold off for a couple of days if you can. Unless something really major happens, I think that things will be pretty well settled down by Tuesday or Wednesday. Ron, I've got to go," Bill said and hung up.

Ron quickly explained what he had learned to the rest of the men. They decided to wait 24 hours and reassess the situation. Besides, there wasn't much that they could accomplish, business wise, on a Sunday. Most of them left to assist Clarence and the boys. Gary remained at the radio and Ron sank into a chair utterly exhausted.

The next thing he knew, someone was gently shaking his shoulder.

“Ron, wake up,” a voice said, ‘Herb and Derek just pulled in.’”

“What time is it?” Ron asked.

“It’s 5:30 pm,” came the reply, “You’ve been sleeping most of the day!”

Ron shook himself trying to wake up. He fumbled for a cigarette, lit it and wearily made his way outside. He greeted Herb and Derek, asking, “Did you have any trouble getting here?”

“Yes and no,” Herb responded, “As you might imagine, we hit plenty of road blocks. Apparently, the President didn’t establish martial law. We kept as low a profile as possible, eventually resorting to traveling by back roads.

“The only real problem we had was in Council Bluffs when we tried to cross the Missouri river. By our good fortune, I knew one of the Iowa Highway Patrolmen and I was able to persuade him to let us pass. Once we hit Nebraska, we got off the Interstate. That delayed us a little, but, as you can see, we made it. We drove around all of the towns that we could. We had enough fuel with us that we didn’t have to stop once to buy gas. We are really tired, could you show us somewhere to lie down and get some rest?”

Gary and Sharon invited Derek and Mary to use their bedroom and Ron and Linda offered to share their quarters with Herb and June. Gary was shocked to see DJ. He vowed to ask Derek about that situation as soon as Derek was awake. When Damon saw DJ, he pulled his dad aside.

“Dad, I’ve got to get back to Iowa and try and pick up my kids!” Damon insisted.

Gary suggested that Damon call his ex-wife and find out what their situation was. When he had some information, Gary advised, they would try to devise a plan.

Chapter Thirty-three – The Bribe

Late Sunday evening at The Ark...

Damon approached his father.

“Damon, did you get a hold of Carrie?” Gary asked.

“Finally,” Damon replied.

“What is their situation?” Gary inquired.

“They burned through the six-month’s worth of advance child support in a big hurry,” Damon remarked. “I half expected that. Anyway the first thing she did was to ask for more money. It took a while, but I learned that the kids are fine. I suggested that they load up the car and head for here. I know I should have asked first, but Geez, Dad!” Damon exclaimed.

“That’s fine Damon, we’ll cross that bridge when we come to it.” Gary replied. “You didn’t give them directions to *The Ark* did you?”

“No Dad,” I told them to go to the Pueblo County Sheriff’s Department and have them call us when they got here. I told her to make sure that they had the kid’s birth certificates and to avoid the main roads. She said that they would head straight west and cross the river at Sioux City. I mentioned the roadblocks. She said that her new husband was from South Dakota and they would just claim that they were going to check on his folks.”

“Well, I hope that they make it okay,” Gary remarked. “The next time we call the Sheriff, we’ll be sure to mention for him to expect them.”

Monday morning, 9:00 am, The Ark...

Herb and Derek were awake, had eaten breakfast and had joined Ron in the security office at Central. Gary joined them from the radio shack.

“Herb,” Ron began, “You are in charge of security, since you have the best military background of anyone here. Derek, you’ll be his second. In any decision calling for an immediate response, no one will question your orders. As to longer term matters, you can present them to the Association and we’ll mutually arrive at a decision. I don’t really expect that the Association will deviate much from your suggestions, so it will more be a matter of providing you with support.’

“Derek,” Ron continued, “The President cancelled all leaves, where does that leave you?”

"In Colorado," Derek replied smiling. "Look fellas, there is a lot more going on here than meets the eye. The SARS epidemic is becoming widespread. As a matter of fact, the real reason our training was accelerated and we were given a short leave was that after we returned, we were to be deployed not to Kosovo, but as supplemental border security. I haven't heard anything on the radio, but I'd be willing to bet that the first order the President gave was to close the borders."

"Is it really that bad, Derek?" Gary asked.

"Worse Dad," Derek continued, "We were all revaccinated for smallpox. Scuttlebutt has it that there have been isolated cases of that around the country."

"Jeezus!" Ron exclaimed. "I thought that smallpox had been eradicated."

"It has been," Derek commented, "But, we were shown an article from the Washington Post, dated February 8, 2004 and there's always speculation about biological weapons."

"I suppose that we had better talk to Fred about his," Ron suggested. "Herb, we set aside a room here in Central for your reloading operation. We were planning on making a run in to Pueblo on Tuesday or Wednesday, give me a list of anything that you need."

"Sure thing Ron," Herb replied, "But first I will need to know what we have for armament."

Ron outlined their complete inventory of firearms, munitions and supplies. Herb thought for a few minutes and handed Ron a list of what he would need. It consisted mostly of primers, powder and bullets. He suggested that he accompany the folks to Pueblo when they went. If he could, he wanted to get a Colorado Driver's License and he knew what powder substitutions they could live with.

The men then toured the facilities, Ron noting Herb's suggestions. When they had finished with the tour, they began unloading Herb's old Ford 1½ ton truck and 30' trailer and Mary's pickup and trailer. After everything was in place, Ron sought out Fred and passed along what he'd learned from Derek.

"I was afraid of something like that," Fred said. "I was fortunate enough to put together a small supply of vaccines for immunizations. Let me tell you Ron that was harder than you can imagine. I have 60 doses of smallpox vaccine, and all of the usual childhood immunization vaccines. I suggest that we review the records on everyone's immunizations and bring everyone up to the level that would permit them to travel to any third world country."

"I'll take care of that immediately. Understand one thing Ron; I have a very limited supply of vaccines. And if it weren't for my Doctor friend back in LA, we wouldn't have any of it. Since the Internet is still up, I'll check for the latest information on SARS at the CDC. If SARS becomes a problem, we'll have to plan on isolation because I have no

vaccines to deal with it. Moreover, the virus seems to mutate rather rapidly.”

Ron returned to the main room and sat down to catch up on the news. Apparently, there had been no further attacks. Troops and rescue workers had made it to Washington and led by NEST Nuclear Emergency Response Teams were beginning rescue efforts. Ron was saddened (NOT!) to learn the several prominent Democrats, including the junior Senator from New York, Uncle Teddy and the two Senators from California, had hastily assembled to respond to the President’s address. Apparently, those who did survive had received mass doses of radiation and weren’t expected to live.

Clarence came up to Ron and said, “Can I talk to you for a minute Ron?”

“What’s up partner?” Ron inquired.

“Ron I called the fella in Pueblo where we bought the 30,000 gallon diesel storage tank,” Clarence explained. “The only tanks he has in stock are 3 10,000-gallon underground tanks that he was storing for a new service station being constructed in Pueblo. I think that he could be persuaded to part with them if he were given enough incentive.

“I called the LP supplier and he is delivering another 5,000 gallon LP tank tomorrow morning. He said that he would put as much LP in it as he could, but he suggested that it was unlikely that he could fill it. Then, I called the supplier that you bought the diesel from. He told me that the most he could deliver was 5,000 gallons of diesel and that we should count ourselves lucky to get that. What do you want me to do?”

“Clarence, call the diesel tank supplier back.” Ron replied, “I don’t care what it costs, buy those tanks! I’ll get John to start digging holes to hold them. Good job, Clarence, I thought we were screwed.”

Tuesday morning, 10 am, at The Ark...

The LP supplier had just finished unloading the new 5,000-gallon tank. Ron, Gary and Clarence walked over to visit with him.

“Howdy partner,” Ron greeted the man, “We really appreciate getting the tank.”

The man laughed, “You should be, normally, the biggest tank we carry is a 1,000 gallon tank. When you folks ordered the other 5,000-gallon tank, an error was made and we ended up with 2 of the tanks. You’re just lucky that our manager got busy and didn’t have time to return the tank. A truck will be along directly with 1,000 gallons of propane. I don’t know when we will be able to supply more; I suggest that you call us every Monday provided the phones stay up.”

As the tractor-trailer rig exited *The Ark*, a tanker truck entered the property. The driver pulled up and got out of the tanker. Walking over to the men, he announced, “I have a delivery for a Mr. Clarence Rawlings.”

"I'm Clarence Rawlings," Clarence replied, "The fill pipe is over here," leading the driver to the fill pipe for their 30k underground tank. "By the way, driver, how much do you have on board that tanker?"

"Ten thousand gallons Mr. Rawlings," he said, "But only half of it is for you. I have to haul the rest back to the depot; the station I was to deliver it to was locked up tight."

"OH, REALLY!" Clarence laughed, "Say driver, you don't suppose..."

Clarence visited with the driver for a while, reached into his pocket, took out something and handed it to the man. The driver took whatever it was Clarence had offered and jammed it into his pocket. As the man attached his hose to the fill pipe, Clarence walked back to Ron and Gary.

"What was that all about?" Ron demanded.

"Clarence was laughing, "Never underestimate the power of a properly placed bribe."

"Huh?" Gary and Ron parroted.

"It seems that he had 10,000 gallons on board and that he was returning 5,000 gallons to the depot because he couldn't make the other delivery," Clarence smiled.

"What did I see you handing him?" Ron demanded?

"A Krugerrand," Clarence laughed and walked away. He stopped and turned. "Ron, this purchase is a cash transaction, so you'd better grab a handful of money and pay the man."

"Well," Ron muttered turning to Gary, "I'd imagine that we will have to find another diesel fuel supplier."

Later that evening at The Ark...

"Clarence walked up to Ron who was glued to the TV. "Ronald, my man," Clarence grinned, "I told you to never underestimate the power of a well-placed bribe."

"Huh?" Ron responded, "What did you do now Clarence?"

"Do you recall those 3 10,000 gallon underground storage tanks?" Clarence asked.

"Yes?" Ron questioned.

"Well, what with things being what they are, the man was willing to part with them," Clarence continued, "However, he wants 50% over their value, in Gold! Do you think we

should go for it?”

“Uh, sure Clarence, you can’t eat gold and we really need those tanks,” Ron laughed, “I’d say that capitalism is alive and well.”

“I thought you’d feel that way Ron so I told him yes,” Clarence replied. “Man, TSHTF on Saturday and here we are on Tuesday and people are already shifting from paper currency to the hard stuff.”

Herb walked into the main room, “Ron,” Herb asked, “When we go to Pueblo tomorrow, do you suppose that we could go by a couple of bars and buy up all the empty long necks that we can get their hands on?”

“Sure Herb, I suppose so, what did you have in mind?” Ron queried.

“Well...” Herb began, “I noticed that we have about 300 gallons of gasoline and...”

Wednesday morning, 8 am, at The Ark...

Chris left in one 5-ton truck and Matt left in the other. They each had a copy of the list that Linda and the ladies had prepared plus plenty of cash and an armed ‘co-pilot’. They would make the rounds purchasing whatever paper products and so forth that they could. Herb and Ron got into one pickup and Gary and Fred got into another. The 4 vehicles formed a caravan to Pueblo. When they reached town, they split up, each proceeding with his assigned task. Ron and Herb and Fred and Gary drove to the gun store.

“Hi fellas,” Kit said, “I’m really afraid that I don’t have much ammo left to sell.”

“That’s alright, Kit,” Ron said, “I want you to meet Herb Johnson. Herb does a bit of reloading, do you have any reloading supplies left?”

“Sure, some,” Kit replied, “What did you have in mind Herb?”

Herb and Kit discussed the primers, powder and bullets that Herb wanted. Kit had some of it but certainly not all by any stretch of the imagination. He suggested that the fellas make the rounds of the various gun shops in Pueblo. In fact, he offered to call ahead and let his business rivals know what the men were looking for; it might, he suggested, pave the way.

When the men had finished making the rounds, they stopped by the Colorado license facility and Herb picked up his Colorado license. They then drove to the Sheriff’s Department. As they walked in, Don was standing at the front counter looking through a sheaf of paperwork.

“Hi Don, how are things going?” Ron asked.

“Oh hi fellas, better than I’d hoped,” Don replied, “Is this gent the fellow from Iowa who did the reloading for the DMPD?”

“Yes,” Ron said, “Meet Herb Johnson.”

The men shook hands. “Herb, did you get a Colorado license yet?” Don asked.

“Yes Sheriff, we just came from there,” Herb replied.

I figured as much,” Don laughed. “Bill, take Herb here and print him and issue him a concealed carry permit.”

“Did you boys find everything you needed?” Don asked.

“Pretty much,” Ron replied, “Where would the best place be to load up on cigarettes?”

“Filthy habit,” the Sheriff laughed. “I’d say try the tobacco shops, but you may not have much of a choice in brands.”

“Any port in a storm,” Ron said grinning.

Herb returned a few minutes later holding a document in his teeth and wiping his hands with a paper towel. The men departed and started searching for tobacco stores. They hit every store that they could find which was likely to sell tobacco. By the time they had finished, they had several cases of cigarettes; as unlikely assortment of brands as one might imagine.

They had even bought papers, all of the Bugler they could find, a couple of cases of pipe tobacco and a couple of rolling machines. Now, if they could just gag down the smoke from those cheap cigarettes...

While they were searching for cigarette stores, they stopped by several bars and bought as many cases of empty long necks as they could. Of course, they had to buy a glass of beer in many of the establishments, and, while they were at it they picked up a half dozen cases of not so empty long necks. As the men had left the last tobacco shop, Gary noticed a brewing store. He dragged the men into the store and they purchased several cases of brewing supplies and a couple of five gallon plastic bottles. Apparently, Gary hadn’t told them everything about his past...

When they arrived back at *The Ark*, John was finishing pushing dirt over the new fuel tanks and Chris and Matt and some of the boys were unloading the 5-ton trucks. Some of the boys helped them unload the pickups and they gathered in the main room to exchange information.

The phone rang. "Damon, phone!" a voice called out.

"Who is it?" Damon asked.

"It's the Sheriff's office, they have some people waiting there to see you." the voice replied.

Chapter Thirty-four – Damon’s Kids

Gary got the keys to Mary’s truck. He and Damon would take the 6-passenger vehicle up to Pueblo. Since it was early evening, Herb suggested the he and Derek ride ‘shot-gun’ in a second vehicle. Each man armed himself with his MBR and a handgun. It wasn’t that there was anything to worry about, but Herb insisted.

They arrived at the Sheriff’s Department about 45-minutes later. They left their rifles in the trucks and entered the office. The kids ran to meet their Dad, except for Aaron who ran to greet his grandfather. Carrie was standing there with a red face, tears streaming down her face. Her new husband was nowhere to be found.

“YOU DIRTY ROTTEN SOB,” she screamed at Damon, rushing to attack him.

A deputy quickly restrained her. “Settle down, ma’am or you will be joining your husband.” The deputy instructed.

Just then, Bill walked out of Don’s office and sizing the situation up motioned to the deputy restraining Carrie to get her into a seat. “Gary, Herb, could I see you for a moment in Don’s office?” Bill asked.

The men entered Don’s office. Bill was sitting in Don’s chair and he motioned for them to take a seat. “As you men know, we routinely run background checks on everyone associated with your project. We do it as a matter of course so that we will know a little about the person and to pre-qualify them for a concealed carry permit.

“I should mention Gary that Udell had better not show up asking for a permit. There aren’t any outstanding wants or warrants on him, but he is a convicted felon. Anyway, when Damon’s ex-wife and her husband showed up with the children, we ran a background check on both of them. The lady is clean, but it seems that there is an outstanding warrant on the husband. Apparently, he failed to show up for a court hearing and a judge in northern Iowa issued a bench warrant for his arrest.”

“Oh really?” Gary said.

“Yes sir,” Bill responded, “Were you planning on letting them join your community?”

“Not if we could help it,” Gary responded. “Damon was worried about his kids and we felt that the only way to get them here was to have the ex-wife and husband bring them. That’s why we arranged to meet them here at the Sheriff’s Department; we didn’t want them to know where our community was. Beyond that, we didn’t really have a plan. I told Damon that we’d cross that bridge when we came to it.”

“I see,” Bill replied, “Then you have no interest whatsoever in helping the gentleman?”

Gary shook his head indicating that he did not.

"That being the case, I have to tell you that we are going to hold him. If he waves extradition to Iowa, Iowa authorities will be here to pick him up shortly. Otherwise, there will be an extradition hearing. These things happen occasionally and I haven't known of a judge yet who has denied extradition. The problem is what to do with your daughter-in-law," Bill said.

"Ex-daughter-in-law," Gary quickly replied.

"Right," Bill said.

"Bill," Gary said, "I came prepared to try and buy her off. Damon prepaid his child support and she was already asking for money. Technically, they have joint custody of the children. How much back child support does he owe, if I might ask? It might be a bargaining chip I can use to resolve this matter."

"Nearly \$20,000," Bill replied, "But I didn't tell you that."

"Is there a room where she and I could visit for a few minutes?" Gary asked.

"Sure," Bill replied, "You can use one of the interrogation rooms."

Bill led Gary and the now calm Carrie to an empty interrogation room and left.

"Carrie, I'm sure sorry to hear of your problem," Gary began.

"Crap," she said, "You were probably behind it!"

"I was not Carrie, I assure you," Gary said holding up a hand. "The Sheriff's Department routinely runs a background check on anyone associated with our project. They do this so that they can issue a concealed carry permit to the person if the person joins our group. I understand that your husband's name came up showing a warrant for back child support. Maybe I can help.

"Carrie, since you and Damon have joint custody, the children can stay with us, just for now, until you and your husband can get this matter resolved," Gary offered. "In turn perhaps there is something I can do to aid you in getting the matter resolved. For instance, how about I advance you enough money to pay that back child support of his and enough for your expenses while that's taking place."

Carrie visibly brightened. "How much did you have in mind?" she asked.

"Oh, say \$25,000," Gary began negotiating.

"Shall we say \$100,000?" Carrie replied.

“\$30,000,” Gary countered.

“\$80,000,” Carrie countered.

\$35,000,” Gary countered.

“\$50,000,” and that’s my final offer,” Carrie said her face beginning to redden.

“Done,” Gary said laying 5 bundles of \$100 bills on the table.

Carrie grabbed the money and stuffed it into her purse.

“Cold blooded broad,” Gary thought to himself.

They rose and exited the interrogation room.

“Did you folks get something worked out? Bill asked.

“Yes Sheriff, the children will be taking their summer vacation with their father early,” Carrie reported. “Come on kids, let’s get your stuff and put it in your Dad’s car.”

Bill raised his eyebrows as if to ask, “How much?”

Gary shrugged, and said “Fifty.”

“And what made you believe that you could get away with that?” Bill countered letting out a low whistle.

“Two things Bill,” Gary replied evenly, “First the fact that the first words out of her mouth when she spoke to Damon were about money. Second, I’ve been taking lessons from Clarence.”

Damon left to help the kids load their things into Mary’s pickup. He and Carrie did not exchange a word. Carrie returned to the office and said, “I’d like to speak to my husband now.”

The men returned to their trucks. Aaron insisted on sitting in front between his father and his grandfather. Britney and Erik were soon sound asleep in the back.

“Thanks Dad,” Damon said. “I was really worried.”

“So was I Damon, so was I,” Gary quietly replied.

“All in all, I got away cheaper than I thought I would,” Gary thought to himself.

A short time later, they arrived back at *The Ark*. Damon led the children to their new

home and tucked them in. When they were asleep, he walked over to Central. He didn't realize it, but tears were streaming down his face.

"Here boy," Clarence said smiling, "Wipe your face.

Thursday morning, 8 am, The Ark...

"I wish that we had a filing cabinet," Ron said.

"What for?" Clarence asked.

"Well, I need some place to keep all of these permits we had to pull," Ron replied. "And the signed documents from all those inspections we had to endure. Cripes, you'd think we were still in California. John said that he had to wait to refill the dirt over the tanks until an inspector gave his blessing."

"I didn't pull any permits for the towers," Clarence said, "Do you suppose that we ought to pull them down?"

"Herb said that they were too far apart anyway, so, why don't you take them apart in sections and move them back here to the compound." Ron replied.

"I'll take care of it this morning," Clarence replied.

Ron returned to his home. "What's for breakfast honey? He asked.

"Fried Hash and eggs?" she asked.

"Sounds good to me," he laughed.

After breakfast, Ron went over to Central and got on the phone. He called every diesel supplier in the area and was eventually able to arrange for six 5,000-gallon deliveries. Then, he called a fellow he knew up in Colorado Springs at AmeriGas, the propane company that he used to work for. They visited for a while, and then Ron hit him up for 4,000 gallons of propane. His friend was reluctant at first, but eventually was persuaded.

"By tomorrow night," he thought, "We will have full tanks."

Clarence came in. "Ron," Clarence said, "I've got the boys dismantling the towers. Tell Herb to get with me and we'll discuss what he wants me to do."

"Let's see," Ron thought, picking up a book, "Were there any other complaints, or can I get back to my novel?"

Herb got with Clarence and they decided that the four towers should be erected at each

of the corners of the housing compound.

“How long will it take you to re-erect them?” Herb asked.

“Only a couple of hours, why?” Clarence asked.

“We don’t really need them at the moment,” Herb replied, “The roving patrols you fellas set up ought to cover us for now. Leave them disassembled until the stuff really hits the fan. I don’t expect that we’ll have to worry about building inspectors then. Besides, I need to get Derek and have a better look around. After that, we’ll discuss implementing some ideas I have.”

Chapter Thirty-five – Lights Out

Two weeks later, The Ark, 7 pm...

The residents were gathered for their weekly meeting. Once again, Amy had been assigned the task of monitoring the TV for breaking news. So far as the news was concerned, there had been no more nuclear exchanges. CNN had reported that the US had briefly gone to DEFCON 3 and later dropped it to DEFCON 4. The SARS outbreak was beginning to take on epidemic proportions.

The UN was utter chaos. The Muslim countries were screaming for the Israelis blood, Israel's Ambassador's was talking about a second Holocaust, and France, Germany and Russia had cemented the relationship formed to resist the Second Gulf War.

The US troops had finally made a successful withdrawal from Iraq, albeit with significant casualties. They had abandoned any equipment that presented a transportation problem and had boarded planes and ships, as available, and were streaming home. President Cheney had federalized the National Guard, but the number of persons heeding the call was less than 50%.

"Fred," Ron began, "Will you start off with your report first?"

"Sure," Fred replied. "We've completed most of the immunizations. For the most part, except for the smallpox immunizations, it was simply a matter of giving booster shots. I don't have much vaccine left, so if we get many new residents, we could have a problem. Otherwise, I'd say that we're set in the medical area."

"John," Ron continued, "I see that the plantings are sprouting nicely, any comments?"

"Well..." John began, "No comments, but I have a question. I've cultivated once. Do we want to expend the fuel to continue cultivation or shall we go with trash farming?"

"What do you think?" Ron responded to John.

"Look, we ended up with full tanks on all of the fuels," John replied. "If we don't cultivate and burn up the diesel fuel, we aren't going to have anywhere to store the biodiesel you folks were talking about. I mean what's the sense of growing 300 acres of sunflowers for their oil and then not have storage?"

"Well we could try to get more tanks," Ron offered.

"Not a chance Ron," Clarence interrupted. "We have a regular fuel depot as it is."

"Ok Clarence," Ron responded, "Go ahead and use the fuel to cultivate John."

"Clarence, your report?" Ron moved on.

“At Herb’s direction,” Clarence began, “We’ve erected short stone walls connecting each of the homes and dug foxholes behind each wall. Chris fabricated gates for the east and west ends of the complex and they’ve been installed. Essentially, the compound is sewed up tight.

“Oh, I almost forgot, we reassembled the towers, putting one at each corner of the compound. I guess that about covers it. No, wait. As you know, I had planned on building the machine shed out of rock and concrete. However, we pretty much depleted our rock supply. John suggested that we erect a pole building.

“So, we drove up to Pueblo, bought the materials and have our new pole building nearly finished. We had planned on locating the building close in. John suggested that we move it out a bit; he said there’s nothing quite like the smell of hog manure. Anyway, we moved it out about 400 yards. Except for hanging the doors, the building is done.”

“Thanks Clarence,” Ron smiled. “Herb?”

“Ron, folks,” Herb said, “Derek and I have been busy. We purchased some dynamite, caps and wire. It’s all stored over there in the tent to the south. We’ve encircled the compound with a series of small holes, dug slit trenches to the holes and ran the wires. With a couple of hours’ notice, we can install a ring of explosives around the entire perimeter of the compound.

“Now, don’t get excited folks, the emplacements are far enough out to preclude any damage to the compound. Of course, that meant a lot more holes, but, what the heck. I’ve been reloading the ammo as fast as you folks have been burning it up on the firing range, but I am beginning to run low on supplies. I called Kit and placed a large order and I picked that up this afternoon.”

“Linda,” Ron said, “The garden is looking nice. I thought that you were going to plant a larger garden.”

‘Initially we were,” Linda reported, “But John pointed out that as a boy growing up in Iowa they never planted sweet corn. He said that they just picked immature field corn and ate it. So, we didn’t plant any sweet corn.”

“But Lyn,” Ron protested, “I saw corn shoots in the garden.”

“It’s popcorn, silly,” she responded.

“Gary,” Herb interrupted, “That’s quite the cannon you have, wherever did you get the idea?”

Gary quickly filled the folks in on the Gatling gun that he had his friend construct for him.

“Gary,” Herb continued, “I had Chris weld up a mount in the back of one of the pickups. I had the tripod setup in the cupola of this building. So, we can either have a mobile weapons platform or a centrally mounted platform covering the entire compound.”

“I made a trip up to a little place called Walsenberg,” Ron said. “I had one hell of a time finding the place. Anyway, they had web gear at really cheap prices, so I loaded up. Oh, and I’d better give you folks a heads up, on the way to Walsenberg, I noticed that there are a lot of prisons in this area. We had better be prepared for uninvited guests, if TSHTF.”

“Ron,” Amy announced, “You’d better turn on the TV.”

...repeating, the CNN announcer said, there are widespread power outages throughout the country. Early indications are that terrorists have attacked selected power substations, bringing down the grids. CNN is, in fact, operating on emergency generators. More on that story as we get more information. We switch now to Jeb Stuart at the CDC for another developing story. Jeb, what have you learned?

The picture switched abruptly to a young man speaking into a microphone. *We are here at the National Center for Infectious Diseases. It has just been announced that the SARS epidemic is reaching near pandemic proportions. In another breaking story, the NCID has announced the outbreak of several diseases on a scattered basis, including cholera and typhus. This is Jeb Stuart reporting from the National Center for Infectious Diseases.*

Ron reached over and turned off the TV. “Well,” he said, “So much for Homeland Security. Folks, time to batten the hatches, the rains have begun.” He looked at Fred.

“We’re completely covered Ron,” Fred replied. “I’ll pass out 3M N95 masks to everyone. People, get with me after the meeting and pick up your masks.”

“Ron?” Herb inquired, “What ground rules do you want in effect for people approaching the compound?”

“I suppose that we should make people keep their distance,” Ron began, “Say 50’,” Ron looked at Fred who nodded, “If they won’t stop, fire at the ground in front of them. If they continue, shoot them.”

With those words, the sudden realization of their true situation hit most of the people assembled. You could have heard a pin drop, as the expression goes.

“People, after you pick up your masks,” Ron said, “Stop by and see me. I’ll issue web gear and the like to everyone. Herb, can I have a word with you?”

Ron explained to Herb that his daughters in Minnesota, Arkansas and Oklahoma had opted not to join the group. They might, in light of the present situation, change their

minds. He went on to say that he was going to call his brother over in the Farmington, NM area and invite him and his wife up for a visit.

Ron carefully wrote down the names of everyone he was concerned about and handed the list to Herb. Herb assured him that the people would be admitted if they showed up, but he warned, something would have to be done to quarantine them briefly to insure that they were free of the many diseases cropping up. Ron suggested that Herb work something out with Fred in that regard.

Ron issued a set of web gear to everyone who showed up. The set consisted of the harness, two magazine cases or two utility pouches, depending on the type of weapon the person had, two canteens complete with cup and stove, a 7" Ka-Bar fighting knife and a medium sized Alice pack. "Any more than that," he reasoned, "Would load them down too much."

Herb and Derek passed out ammo to everyone. It had been a long-standing policy that everyone kept his or her individual weapon at home. However, each person was limited to a small amount of ammunition. From this moment forward, everyone was to have a full issue of ammunition and was to travel armed at all times.

Herb didn't know how long it would take for the latest developments to rip the country apart, but it was bound to happen, sooner probably than later. And, there were still the surprises that he had for the group and hadn't mentioned. Yep, they were as ready as they were ever going to be.

The next morning, Saturday, 9 am, at The Ark...

The phone rang in the security office shattering the silence that was offset only by the soft drone of the TV playing in the background.

"Homeowner's Association," Sharon said picking up the phone.

"Could I please speak to Ron Green?" the voice asked urgently.

"Whom?" Sharon responded, "Shall I say is calling?"

"Ma'am, my name is Kit Carson, is Ron there?" Kit replied.

"Ron," Sharon called out, "There is a call for you from a Kit Carson."

"Ron," Kit began, "All hell has broken loose here in Pueblo and around the country. I was up all night holding off looters. I've got to get my family out of town. Do you suppose that you folks could send up one of those 5-ton trucks and an escort? We will empty out my gun shop and my family and I could join you, if you'd permit. I have three strapping sons who are skilled marksmen and, in case you didn't know, we're Mormon's, so I can assure you that we would not be a burden."

“Kit?” Ron began, “How did you happen to call me?”

“Hell, Ron,” Kit laughed, “half the community knows about those ‘screwballs from California’, as your group is known. You haven’t exactly kept a low profile, now have you? Anyway, I called the Sheriff and he suggested that I call you.”

“Kit, get packed up,” Ron replied, “We will have two 5-ton trucks and a heavily armed escort at your store within the hour. Can you hold out that long?”

“I’m pretty sure I can, Ron,” Kit replied, “Don stationed a patrol car outside of each gun shop. That seemed to scare them off and now that it’s daylight, I think we’ll be ok. But hurry, if you can, Don told me that he can’t spare the deputy for much longer.”

Ron quickly filled Herb in on the conversation.

Herb nodded, told Derek to get Chris and Matt to drive the 5-ton trucks. He also instructed Derek to get the pickup with the pedestal and mount the Gatling gun.

“Load several cases of the flechette ammo on the pickup and the gunner can load the drum magazines while we’re on the way to town,” he instructed.

Then he turned and went outside, walking over to the storage shed tent where the dynamite was stored. He grabbed a cardboard box, opened it, removed a rectangular metal container that resembled a suitcase and in turn opened it. He began to remove the contents from the ‘suitcase’ inserting them one by one into the small pouches sewn onto the sides of his magazine pouches. He laid out four more of the devices and closed the case. He then returned to the waiting vehicles and handed the four objects to Derek.

“Are those...?” Ron began.

“M-67, fragmentation grenades,” Herb finished Ron’s sentence. “I was a SEAL, and while it was no mean feat, I’ll tell you, I managed to accumulate several of these over my career. They’re old, but, I’ve taken extreme care with them and they should be fine. Since Derek and I are the only persons with actual experience with grenades, I’m not going to issue them to anyone else.”

Derek inserted the grenades inverted into his magazine pouches and climbed aboard the back of the pickup that had the Gatling gun mounted. He sat down, ripped open a case of the flechettes and, after carefully inspecting a magazine, began to load the magazine. His Dad had taken Derek aside shortly after he’d arrived, shown him the Gatling gun and explained its operation. A convoy was formed, with a pickup in front followed by the pickup with the gun, followed by a 5-ton truck followed by another pickup followed by the second 5-ton truck followed by two pickups. In total, there were 14 people aboard the convoy. Ron drove the lead pickup and Herb joined him.

“Herb, do you really think that we should reveal our Gatling gun?” Ron asked.

“Ron,” Herb replied, “The Sheriff is bound to find out about it sooner or later. I just hope that we don’t have to use the hand grenades; I’m not quite ready to reveal their presence just yet. And, that Gatling gun is controversial in my opinion. It was, after all, the first machine gun invented.”

They arrived at Kit’s store. The deputy having departed shortly before they arrived, they didn’t have occasion to explain the Gatling gun. They dismounted; Derek remained on guard, and in thirty minutes had the majority of the merchandise loaded aboard the first 5-ton truck. They mounted up and followed Kit to his home. Kit’s sons were equipped with FAL rifles and were wearing a full set of web gear.

Everyone pitched in, again except for Derek, and had the second 5-ton truck loaded in a few minutes. They remounted the trucks. Kit was instructed to insert his vehicle in the center of the convoy between the two 5-ton trucks and after the center pickup. They drove straight back to *The Ark*.

When they arrived at *The Ark*, the guard, one of the twins, informed Ron that he had visitors. They pulled in and stopped near one of two tents that had been erected about 100’ from the compound. Ron got out and rushed to greet his brother and sister-in-law.

“Did you have any trouble getting here?” Ron asked.

“Not really,” Don answered his younger brother, “What’s with the mask?”

“We hear on TV that SARS is becoming a pandemic,” Ron replied. “We have adopted this precaution since there isn’t a vaccine available.”

“We haven’t been exposed,” Don assured his brother, “Living out in Cedar Hill, we’re pretty much homebodies. In fact, this is the first we’ve set foot out of the house since that bomb went off in Washington. Fred joined Ron, just catching the tail end of Don’s statement.

“You haven’t had contact with anyone in that time?” Fred queried. “Hi I’m Fred, the medic.”

“No sir,” Don responded, “Not one soul. And, we didn’t stop on the way up here either.”

“Would you folks excuse us for a moment?” Fred said pulling Ron by the arm. “Ron, the incubation period for SARS is from 2 – 10 days. If your brother and his wife haven’t had contact with anyone since the bombing, I don’t think that we will need to quarantine them. Kit, and his family, however, is a different story. Let your brother know and I’ll deal with Kit and his family.”

Chapter Thirty-six – Kit Carson

Fred walked up to Kit and his family, “Kit, I’m afraid that we’re going to have to ask you folks to camp out for a few days.”

“Uh...the SARS thing?” Kit asked.

“I’m afraid so, Kit,” Fred replied.

“To tell you the truth, I didn’t even really expect you folks to say yes,” Kit replied, “It’s ok.”

“Kit, you’ve been good to us,” Fred stated, “Still, we have to vote on your admission. Let me explain our system to you.”

Fred quickly outlined the criteria they’d established before ever coming to Colorado. He assured Kit that a lot of the folks knew of him and that he didn’t foresee any difficulties with their admission. He suggested that Kit and his family make themselves comfortable and told him that the ladies would bring them hot meals at mealtimes.

Saturday evening in the main room...

The hastily called meeting came to order. Ron, Gary, Clarence, and Fred spoke on behalf of Kit and his family. There was little discussion and when the matter came to a vote, Kit and his family were voted in. The meeting broke up and Ron left to inform Kit of the decision. Donning his N95, Ron approached Kit and his family.

“Well partner,” Ron said, “The vote went your way. Now, we need to discuss living arrangements and we need to figure out whether or not you intend to make a contribution to the Association.”

“What do you mean by contribution?” Kit asked.

“Kit, most everyone here has contributed financially to *The Ark Homeowners Association*.” Ron explained, “I believe that, should you chose, a contribution of a portion of your inventory would be most appreciated by the group. That would free our funds to buy more building materials. We have a bit of a housing shortage at the moment; we’re actually short a home for Amy and her husband. Also, we’re short of building materials. We’re certainly not going to turn you and your family away, and we’ll supply all of the labor to assist you in erecting a new home.”

“I see Ron, what you’re really suggesting is that we pay for our own home.” Kit responded smiling, “And you’re offering to purchase a portion of my inventory to give us the money to purchase the building materials.”

“Kit,” Ron laughed, “You explained it far better than I. Would you consider taking on the

task of explaining how it works to any other newcomers to the community?”

They all laughed. Kit introduced his wife, Norma, and 3 sons to Ron. Ron assured him that they were most welcome in the community and suggested that Kit take the time to review the inventory that had been offloaded from the trucks and placed in the machine shed.

Kit was free to pick and choose what he wanted to keep and what would be sold to the community. Ron explained that the group had over 500 acres planted in crops of various kinds and had a small but diverse herd of livestock. The boys went to bed and Ron, Kit and Norma sat and visited until well past midnight.

When Ron got back to Central, the young man manning the security office handed him a pink telephone message slip. The Urgent box was checked and the message was from the Sheriff's office.

Ron picked up a phone and dialed the number for the Sheriff's office.

“This is Ron Green, I just received a message that someone from your office called,” Ron said.

“Just a moment Mr. Green, Sheriff Constantine would like to speak with you,” The deputy replied.

“Ron, Don,” the Sheriff said. “What's this I hear about you folks showing up in town today with a machine gun?”

Ron explained the problem that they'd had with the flechette ammo and Gary's unique solution to it. He went on to say that Herb said that he, the Sheriff, would find out about it sooner or later and felt it an appropriate time to make use of the unique weapon.

“Ron,” Don replied, “If things weren't getting so bad so quickly, there would be hell to pay for that little stunt. But, the way things are going, I'm going to let it pass. I'll tell you, the lights are out all over the country. It will take several days to get the power grid up, if they even can. Those terrorists took out just enough substations around the country to make the whole grid fail. And, as fast as the utility companies are rebuilding them, they are hitting another substation or a tower and preventing the grid from coming back online. One other thing Ron, you've heard about the SARS thing haven't you?”

“Yes Don and we've instituted a minimum 50' quarantine distance and issued N95 masks to all of our people.” Ron explained.

“What is your policy if they won't stop?” Don asked.

“Our people have instructions to tell them to stop; then to fire a shot into the ground in front of them; and finally, if they fail to take heed, to shoot them,” Ron replied somewhat

coldly.

“Doggone it!” Don replied, “That’s pretty severe.”

“Don, what are the latest estimated death tolls from the SARS pandemic?” Ron asked.

“Five million and rising rapidly,” Don admitted.

“And Don, how much delay to you think that there is in the reporting system?” Ron continued.

Don let out a low whistle. “I see what you mean Ron,” he replied. “Ron do you have any other surprises that I should be aware of?”

“Don, so help me God, I just learned of it today, but it seems that we have a small supply of hand grenades.” Ron reluctantly admitted.

Don laughed, “Ron I’ll pretend that I didn’t hear that. You just make dang good and sure that only Derek and Herb play with those ‘things’. Oh, and Ron, please don’t bring any of those ‘things’ to town, alright?”

“We wouldn’t think of it Don,” Ron replied somewhat duplicitously. “Don, we’ll be in Pueblo in the morning. We need to pick up a load of cement and other building materials. We need to construct a home for Kit and Norma.”

“I’ll put the word out to my deputies that you have my permission for your irregular shotgun,” Don acknowledged and hung up chuckling.

Ron told the young man to call him at home at 5 am and left to get some shuteye.

Sunday morning, The Ark, 7 am...

“Clarence,” Ron suggested, “How about you take three pickups to town and get as many gas hot water heaters as you can. If we build an outer ring of homes around the compound we will need 14 additional hot water heaters. And, while you’re at it, try your best to get extra jets for the heaters. I don’t suppose that we can get any more of those shingles, can we?”

“I doubt it Ron,” Clarence responded, “On the other hand the contractor hadn’t taken into consideration the solar heating units when he ordered the shingles. I kept his overage and paid him for them. We probably have enough to shingle six homes. I showed the solar heating units to Derek and he said that he could build them using black PVC pipe for a fraction of what we paid for them.”

“That’s very good news Clarence,” Ron smiled. “If necessary, we can power the remainder of the homes using the wind turbines. Have Derek give you a list of what he

needs to build solar heating units for 14 homes. However, look and see if there are any generators around, if you can get 7,500-watt units or bigger, that would be great.

“And, check with an RV dealer, he may have some RV units. They come in gas, LP and Diesel. My preference would be diesel first, LP second. We simply do not have enough gasoline to power gasoline generators, but if that is all you can find, get them. Oh, and when you get back, we need to do something more permanent than that tent for the explosives. I was thinking that a bunker should be built into the hillside.”

“I’ll do what I can Ron,” Clarence said shaking his head, “I’ll do what I can.”

As Clarence rose to leave, Chris and Matt walked into the security office.

“Holding court are you?” Chris teased Ron.

“More like hoping and praying,” Ron laughed.

“Chris, would you and Matt take the 5-ton trucks to town and buy as much cement as you can?” Ron asked. “Herb will arrange an escort for you.”

“Can do,” Chris replied, “But we won’t have to make many more trips to Pueblo will we? I’ll have to admit that I’m getting a little antsy.”

“Hang on Chris, let me make a call before I answer that.” Ron replied. He went to the file cabinet, removed an invoice and dialed a number. No answer. He dialed the Sheriff’s office’s number from memory.

“Sheriff’s Department,” a deputy answer, “Can I help you?”

“Deputy,” Ron replied, “This is Ron Green. Could you tell me if there are any lumberyards open on Sunday in Pueblo? Un-huh, I see.” Ron started scribbling on a pad. “Thanks deputy.”

“No Chris, I’m hoping today will be the last trip for a while,” Ron replied. Ron went to the HP G85xi printer and made a copy of his scribbled list. “You might want to check these lumberyards for cement,” he said handing the list to Chris. If all else fails, check in with the Sheriff’s office. Maybe they can hook you up with a ready-mix contractor who can sell you bulk cement.”

Herb walked into the security office. “I got Clarence set up with escorts and he is off,” Herb explained. “I’ll send three pickups with Chris.”

“Herb, the Sheriff called late last night asking about our special shotgun,” Ron explained. “I was honest with him about it and he gave us a pass, so to speak. His deputies will look the other way in view of the deteriorating conditions. On the other hand, I told him about your ‘special devices’ and he advised that we had best keep them here

at *The Ark*. When Clarence gets back, he will build you a bunker for the explosives, get with him and show him where you want it.”

“Ron,” Herb glared, “I sure wish that you hadn’t said anything to the Sheriff about my grenades.”

“Like you said yesterday, Herb,” Ron smiled, “He was bound to find out about them sooner or later. I took a chance that we’re far better off being honest with the man. As the situation in this country deteriorates, I doubt that it will make much difference.”

Sunday evening, The Ark, 7 pm...

Clarence had done well. He had managed to find the 16 gas hot water heaters and 10 7.5kw diesel generators. He had even remembered to pick up plumbing supplies for the new homes including sinks, toilets, faucets and copper pipe. Chris had one truck so loaded with bagged concrete that it was on the springs. Even the escort trucks were loaded with bagged concrete. The other was filled nearly to overflowing with bulk concrete.

Ron had done well too. He called the one lumberyard he could find open and had placed a huge order for lumber, drywall and fasteners. He had ordered enough asphalt shingles to cover 10 homes and enough insulation for 16 homes. The yard had demanded a rather exorbitant delivery fee, but when Ron had agreed, stated that the delivery would take place before noon tomorrow. The terms were cash only. He had spent a couple of hours on the phone trying to reach the Colorado Springs roofing contractor without success.

Kit and Norma were overjoyed to see all of the building materials, the way these folks worked, their new home would be ready by the time they cleared quarantine.

Ron sat in the security office marveling at their good fortune. “If we are lucky, we won’t grow too large,” he thought. “There is a limit to how many people we can support on a section of land. On the other hand, I suppose that we are going to end up being scavengers once the disease runs its course. Who knows, maybe we’ll find a petroleum tank farm with millions of gallons of diesel. Then, we won’t have to produce the biodiesel at all. And, let’s face it; a 5 acre garden would sure feed a lot of people.”

Monday morning, 10:45 am, The Ark...

Three tractor-trailer rigs pulled in carrying the building supplies. The owner of the lumberyard was riding in the cab of the first tractor along with the driver. He got down and Ron went to greet him.

“Mister, you durn near cleared out my yard,” the man laughed noticing the mask and not offering to shake hands. “I figured ‘what the hell’ and loaded what was left on a fourth truck. It’s a take it or leave it deal mister and it’s for cash.” He gave Ron a number.

Ron said, "I'll be right back fella!" and went to get the money. When he returned, he counted out the cash to the man and the man asked, "Where do you want it unloaded?"

Clarence directed the drivers to an area that would limit the distance they would have to move the materials and the drivers got out, fired up a fork lift they had towed along and began to unload. The fourth truck pulled in just as they were starting to unload the third truck. Meanwhile, the lumberyard owner had set down his briefcase, strapped on a single action western rig and placed the cash in the briefcase. He climbed back in the cab of the lead semi and when they had finished unloading, the four trucks departed.

Clarence assembled his crew and directed them on how he wanted the buildings laid out. Ron joined him and they started back to Central. Ron's handheld radio squawked and he responded. It was the front gate and there were two cars there with women claiming to be his daughters.

Clarence grinned and Ron replied, "I'll be right there."

Chapter Thirty-seven – Ron’s Kids

When Ron arrived at the gate, Jennifer, her husband and their children were in one car, and Brenda, her new husband and, dang, Brenda’s child from her first marriage. “I wonder how she managed to pull that one off,” he thought.

“I am so happy to see you guys,” Ron exclaimed. “I had about given up hope. Follow me and I’ll show you where to park.”

The girls started toward their father, but he held up his hand. “Sorry girls,” he said, “But we have strict quarantine procedures in effect. We’ll have to wait until later to get closer to each other.”

He led the two cars to the quarantine area, but indicated that they should park on the other side of his car. He keyed his handheld radio and gave instructions that two tents be erected 100’ from the Carson’s tent.

“Have you guys eaten?” he asked.

“No Dad,” Brenda replied, “You wouldn’t happen to have a pizza or something would you?”

Ron got back on the radio and gave instructions to contact Linda and have her bring her daughter and his daughter and their families something to eat. The tents were quickly erected and folding chairs set out. Linda appeared, tears streaming down her face, and set a large platter of sandwiches on the ground. Kevin was right behind her carrying a pitcher of ice tea and glasses. Linda joined Ron and sat down.

“I was worried sick,” Linda said. “I have a million questions.”

“Mom,” Brenda said, “We almost waited too long. When the lights went out, we packed up and headed here. The map you sent was really accurate. We drove straight through, but, we had trouble getting gas and we had to make so many detours and, well, you know. We are exhausted. Is it ok if we get some sleep and talk in the morning?”

When they had finished eating, Brenda and her husband and child went into one tent and Jennifer and her troop entered the other. Ron and Linda slowly walked back to Central.

“Now if Paula would just show up, I’d never ask God for another thing,” Ron said.

They parted company, Ron continuing to the security office and Linda returning home. When he got to the security office, Clarence was waiting for him.

“Ron, we screwed up,” Clarence said. “We didn’t buy any wood stoves for the new houses.”

“Damn, that means we have to risk a return to Pueblo tomorrow,” Ron said. “I better call Don and see if we dare.”

Ron dialed the number to the Sheriff’s Department from memory.

“Sheriff’s Department, deputy Cole,” deputy Cole answered.

“Deputy Cole, this is Ron Green, is the Sheriff in?” Ron said.

“Yes sir and he was just talking about calling you,” the deputy replied.

“Ron, Don,” Don answered, “What’s up?”

“Don we overlooked getting woodstoves and I was wondering if it was safe for us to travel to Pueblo tomorrow?” Ron asked.

“Barely,” Don replied, “The SARS thing has hit the Colorado Springs area and I expect we will be having cases here any moment. Ron, I was just about to call you. You remember my wife Myrna, Don Jr. and Susan don’t you? You met them at the Barbeque.”

“Of course I remember them Don,” Ron replied.

“Ron, do you suppose that they could travel back to the property with you tomorrow?” Don tentatively asked.

Before Ron could answer, Don continued, “In fact Ron, several of my deputies would like for their families to join you too, might that be possible?”

“Don we’ve just begun erecting 14 new homes,” Ron replied. “It may get a bit tight, but we’ll manage. How many families are we talking about?”

“Twenty-four including mine, Ron,” Don replied quietly, “can you handle that many people?”

“Don, we’ll find a way,” Ron replied, “We are building 14 new homes and have enough material for maybe two more. After that, it may be a struggle, but we’ll manage one way or another. What about the deputies and yourself?”

“Ron,” Don replied, “We’ve got to stay and try and maintain law and order as long as we can. We will join you when, and if, we can. Meanwhile, what kind of stoves were you looking for?”

Ron described the stoves to the Sheriff. He also suggested that they only had about 300 gallons of gasoline and if there were anything Don could do about it, he would be grateful. Don asked if there were anything else that they needed and Ron added generators

of any description, food and a few other things. Don suggested that they convoy in early and come straight to the Sheriff's Department. He would have the families all gathered and would see if his deputies could locate the things Ron wanted.

Tuesday morning, 5 am, The Ark...

The men assembled quietly and efficiently. They were taking the old 1½ ton Ford, with Herb's 20' trailer attached, both 5-ton trucks and all but three pickups including the pickup with the Gatling gun mounted. Herb didn't say a word, he simply handed Derek 4 grenades and got into the passenger side of the lead vehicle that Ron was driving. Herb gave Ron 'the look' and rolled down his window to let the smoke out. Ron kept quiet and rolled his window down to give Herb a break.

Everyone had his instructions and a list, it was time to buy if possible and scavenge if necessary. It had been decided that they would go to the Sheriff's Department first, evaluate what the Sheriff and his deputies had managed to gather and then they would fan out from there, collecting as much of what was on their lists as were possible.

They arrived at the Sheriff's office just after dawn. Pueblo was far quieter than usual. They dismounted and Ron and Herb went inside. Don was dozing in a chair. A deputy nudged him and he startled awake. He gave Ron and Herb a brief wave, grabbed his umpteenth cup of coffee and joined the men.

"My deputies were very busy last night," Don began, "You may have noticed how quiet it is outside. There are three gasoline delivery trucks parked in the parking lot, each with full tanks. We managed to gather up about two dozen wood burning stoves and a 1½ ton truck load of food."

Don continued to list the materials his deputies had gathered. When he had finished, Herb went outside, made adjustments to the list and added a few things. He sent the men on their way, instructing them to return to the Sheriff's Department when they had finished. He shook his head, turned and returned inside. Ron and Don were deeply engaged in a conversation. Herb grabbed a cup of coffee and joined them.

"Herb, Ron, come with me," Don instructed. He led them to the Departmental armory, unlocked the door and bade them enter.

"Gentlemen, I intend to pass these weapons out to the deputies," Don explained, "However, we have some spare weapons and I'd feel better knowing that the extra weapons were with your families."

With that, Don called to a couple of deputies to help and he handed each of the four men six M-16 rifles. They took the weapons to the trucks and placed them inside. Herb stayed to watch the trucks and the other four men went back inside. The two deputies grabbed handcarts and began to wheel several cases of .223 ammo out. They returned, reloaded the handcarts and made a second trip to the truck. Meanwhile, the Sheriff

reached over and grabbed a suitcase type gun case.

“Ron, this is a Remington M-24 SWS,” Don explained, “And this,” he said handing Ron another case, “Is a third generation night sight for that weapon.” He reached for another, smaller case and said, “And this is a silencer for that weapon.” He picked up a case of .308 match ammunition and nodded to the door, “Shall we?” he said.

You could have parked a truck in Ron’s mouth. They went out to the truck and Ron handed the cases to Herb while Don put the case of ammo in the back of the truck. A deputy walked over and stood by the truck. Don motioned for both men to join him once more in the office. They returned to the armory. Don handed Herb a weapon that looked like a huge oversized revolver with a stock. Herb immediately recognized the weapon as being used to launch teargas shells.

Don indicated that they should step outside of the armory and he walked over to a deputy and gave the man instructions. The deputy grabbed a handcart, entered the armory and loaded 4 boxes. He wheeled the cart outside and, apparently unloaded the cases into the back of the truck. When he returned, the cart was empty. He wheeled the cart back into the armory, loaded more boxes and repeated his previous performance. When the deputy returned, he nodded to the Sheriff and went behind the counter.

“I’ve given you two cases of pepper spray cartridges and two cases of tear gas cartridges for the weapon,” Don explained. That second set of boxes contained 30 round magazines for the M-16’s. Let’s go into my office.”

They entered Don’s office and everyone flopped into a chair.

“Gentlemen,” Don began, “You’ve only been in this area for a few months. My initial impression of you was that you were potentially a bunch of crackpots. I ran extensive background checks on all of you. I have watched you closely and have observed, or my deputies have observed, that you’re hard working, fair in your business dealings and, above all determined.

“If you have a single fault it is perhaps that you’ve been a little too open in some of your dealings, I refer particularly to the thing about the precious metals. There haven’t been any wild parties down at your farm. As fast as I can spare the husbands, they will join you at the farm. I’ll add as many additional patrols in your area as possible. The men will want to see their wives and families. If there is a problem, do not hesitate to call. Here, take this,” he said handing them a handheld radio and charging stand.

Ron and Herb were especially pleased with the Sheriff’s analysis of them. He was right; if they had faults the first was that they were on occasion naïve. The second, they had to admit was that they weren’t closed mouth enough. They expressed their gratitude to Sheriff Don Constantine and promised to take care of the families who were joining them as if they were members of their own families. Ron asked for a couple of spare batteries for the radio.

By the time that they had returned outside, all of the trucks had returned, having completed their missions. The families boarded their own vehicles and Herb assigned their shotgun drivers to drive the gasoline delivery trucks. They formed up a convoy, led by a deputy in a patrol car and headed south. After they left, the Sheriff returned to his office and called *The Ark* to advise that the convoy had left for the farm.

When they arrived at the farm, twenty-four additional tents had been arranged at 50' intervals. Clarence had his people working hard on getting the foundations poured for the new homes. Apparently, he had discovered an additional source of rock and there was plenty of sand and crushed rock left over from the earlier construction phase. In fact, Ron noted, they already had several foundations in.

By the end of the day, the fourteen new foundations were in and the next day, they could pour the slabs and the day after, construction could begin on the homes. In town the various crews had picked up enough additional building materials to build several additional homes.

They had also 'recovered' several more water heaters, a few generators the deputies had missed, 'liberated' a few kegs of beer and half a pickup load of sodas from a bar that had clearly been abandoned.

They had another 5-ton truck load of bulk cement, the other being loaded primarily with shingles and other items too numerous to list. They had been thorough, and had liberated the entire stock of jeans and underwear, shirts, etc. from an abandoned clothing store.

Arrangements had been made to provide hot meals for the families. The community had virtually doubled in size in a matter of hours. Ron learned, quite by accident, that the Sheriff had roused out a local physician and the families had been given their shots late last night. The only truck they unpacked was the 1½ ton truck of groceries. At the bottom of the pile, they had discovered two cases of Jack Daniels Whiskey. The Sheriff had thought of everything.

Over the course of the next month, and working at break-neck speed, the 14 additional homes had been completed. The deputies families and been temporarily assigned two to a home. Using the extra construction materials, 6 homes in addition to the originally planned 14 homes had been constructed. That was all the building materials they had.

Clarence had apparently mentioned this fact to one of the deputies and 14' by 70' used mobile homes appeared one or two or three at a time. In the end, they had actually ended up with excess housing because the deputies or perhaps some civilian member of the Sheriff's Department ended up delivering a total of 24 mobile homes. The Sheriff and his family had been assigned to one of the homes constructed from stone. The deputies' families were all assigned to mobile homes and the community had 15 empty homes of stone construction and one empty mobile home.

Within a week of completing the construction, the Sheriff and all 24 of the Deputies had moved in. The remaining empty mobile home turned out to be the Sheriff Department's mobile command post. It seemed that the Pueblo County's Sheriff's Department had moved to new quarters. The gardens had begun to produce edible produce and the ladies had hurriedly planted a second acre of garden. One of the deputies had even shown up in a pickup loaded with canning supplies and two additional pressure canners. Sheriff Donald Constantine was made a member of the Senate.

Chapter Thirty-eight – First Attack

July 4th, The Ark...

Ron, Gary, Clarence, Chris, Fred, Herb, John and several of the residents together with Don and several of the deputies were gathered in the main room of Central.

“We slowly watched a thriving community die,” Don said. “Early on, families began to flee, probably to the mountains. A couple of enclaves formed, one made up of a group of Mormons, the other a neighborhood. They were beginning to get some of the power grid back up, I suppose that the terrorists caught SARS and died off. Communities with municipal power simply disconnected themselves from the grid and rationed power.”

The deputies joined in the conversation explaining that the majority enjoyed hunting, fishing and outdoor recreation. Each had, over the six weeks, returned to his home, collected his camping gear, firearms, ammo, fishing gear, the extra clothing and so forth and transferred the collection to *The Ark*. The Sheriff, it turned out had not been idle in the months since *The Ark* project began.

“You folks got me to thinking,” he explained. “I converted most of my savings into long term food, medical supplies and the like. Nothing on the scale of what you folks have here, but I have a large cache back in Pueblo. Now that the SARS pandemic has run its course, I’m thinking it’s time to retrieve my cache. We are running patrols with four men to a car, covering the county as best we can.”

Gary recapped the news he was getting from Ham radio. Since TV broadcasting had stopped almost a month earlier, he was the sole source of news from the outside world. The phone system was down and only a few radio stations were broadcasting, mostly on very restricted schedules.

“As near as I can figure,” Gary said, “Somewhere between 75 and 100 million people died in the epidemic. The large cities were the hardest hit and all of the major cities are nearly ghost towns. Cheney declared martial law when the epidemic was officially declared to be a pandemic. He activated the remnants of FEMA, but they are totally ineffective. FEMA works primarily by coordinating local resources and supplying federal money. There are few local resources and no federal money.

“The BATFE tried to turn the situation into an excuse to begin a major firearms grab. Two things happened; first, a lot of BATFE agents ended up dead and second, when Cheney saw how the Winds were blowing, he issued an Executive order suspending the NFA and all laws restricting the possession of firearms.”

“There were,” Gary continued, “Widespread race riots, but they died down as the pandemic took its toll. California, Maryland and other states with restrictive firearms laws were the worst hit. People simply lacked the means of defending themselves. I hear...”

One of the two deputies manning the mobile command center walked up to the Sheriff and began to whisper into his ear. The Sheriff rose, said, "Excuse me folks, I'll be back when I can. Herb, would you join me?"

The deputies, sensing something ominous was up, rose and followed the Sheriff.

"You know, that was quite an idea Damon came up with," Ron commented. "When he first suggested that we bury the bodies of the unwanted trespassers along the fence line, I thought that he had lost his mind. But when he showed me the grave marker he'd made for the first grave, I realized the genius in his plan."

The marker, a plain wooden plaque, simply said, "Trespasser – shot June 2nd, 2005."

The Sheriff and Herb returned after about 20 minutes.

"It appears that we have our first real situation," Don announced. "Way back when, the prisons in the area went on full lockdown. We just had some radio traffic from the Fremont County Sheriff's office. They are reporting breakouts from several of the prisons. There is nothing that my small force of deputies can do; we'd be too thinly spread out. Herb and I have talked it over and we've agreed to increase the patrols around the property from 4 to 8. Since none of the prisons have huge armories, the convicts probably won't start out being heavily armed. We are just going to have to hunker down and wait for developments."

Herb and Derek had moved the dynamite holes out from the compound because of the construction and the addition of the mobile homes. Herb grabbed Derek and a couple of deputies and they retrieved the dynamite from the bunker Clarence had constructed and began to set the charges. The deputies' families were temporarily relocated to the main room of Central. While Derek and Herb placed the charges, Damon set about, with the assistance of 3 volunteers, loading the 200 round drum magazines. Ten were loaded with flechettes; five were loaded with 12 pellet 00 buck and the last five with slugs. They had yet to fire the Gatling gun in anger or in their defense. The weapon was mounted on the pickup and the shield that Chris and Matt had fashioned was attached to the weapon. (The shield was made from 3/8" plate and had several layers of Kevlar riveted to it.)

Just before dawn, July 6th, at The Ark...

"I have movement on the road coming south," a roving patrol reported. "I make it 5 vehicles...no wait, 7 vehicles. They are stopping just north of the property."

Every radio in the compound blared, "Red Alert, this is not a drill..."

"I make it about 30 men, armed with shotguns, AR's and some handguns," the sentry reported. The sentry was equipped with night vision binoculars provided by the Sheriff's Department. Nearly forty people climbed aboard pickups and made their way to about a quarter mile from the northeast corner of the property. They stopped and dismounted

and began to make their way to the sentry vehicle. The pickup with the Gatling gun, dubbed "Thumper" because of the distinctive sound it made when fired, held back, it's motor idling.

The group quietly and cautiously made its way to the sentry vehicle. When they arrived, they spread out assuming prone positions along a line stretching about 100 yards. The intruders were not well organized. They had some noise discipline, but not much. They tended to bunch up into two groups. As the groups climbed over the fence, Don raised a megaphone and announced, "Sheriff's Department, stop where you are!"

The intruders began to fire wildly, unsure of a target. The defenders calmly returned the fire, aiming for the muzzle flashes. The pickup with Thumper roared up and Damon began cranking for all he was worth. He quickly exhausted the first drum, loaded a second, this time with 00 buckshot and continued to crank.

As quickly as it began, the firefight ended. Herb, with the night scope equipped M-24, had accounted for several one-shot kills. Thumper had taken a toll, especially after Damon had loaded the magazine containing the 00 buck. The defenders remained in their positions listening to the moans of the dying intruders. As dawn broke, they slowly rose to their feet and walked cautiously towards the intruders.

Herb took his pistol and coldly dispatched any of the intruders who hadn't had the common decency to die. After a brief discussion, the men dragged the intruders over to the fence and carefully draped the bodies on the fence facing out to the road. Someone grabbed a piece of cardboard and hastily scrawled, "Trespassers" on the cardboard and using a piece of wire, hung the makeshift sign around the neck of one of the dead men.

Two of the defenders had received minor flesh wounds and Fred quickly administered to their needs. He had remained in Central until he had received a radio call outlining the injuries. He and a nurse, the wife of one of the deputies, administered first aid to the wounded men who had both received grazing wounds.

After gathering the firearms and ammo carried by the cons, they returned to the compound and gathered to discuss the event.

Herb was the first to speak, "What's up with that, 'Sheriff's Department, stop where you are' Bull?"

Don replied quickly, "Too many years in law enforcement, I guess."

"I don't mean to get on you too hard, Don," Herb cooled, "Maybe it's my SEAL training. Should we find ourselves in a similar situation, I'd suggest that the only thing going over the megaphone is the fire command and not even that if we can avoid it."

"Let's face it folks," Herb continued, "We were lucky. Thanks to the Sheriff, we have night vision equipment. Those people were disorganized, poorly armed and apparently

untrained. What is going to happen if we are attacked during the daylight by a properly armed force of individuals who have some organizational skills and military backgrounds?”

“Do you have any suggestions?” Don asked.

“Gary and I were visiting a while back,” Herb replied. “He got to talking about the war in Vietnam. His cousin was a Ranger who was killed at the tail end of a reconnaissance mission. That set me to thinking that with the manpower we have, we should think about doing our own LRRP’s. The problem is, we are short on trained personnel.”

“Well not exactly,” one deputy spoke up. “I was in the Corps, Force Recon. And a lot of my fellow deputies were in Desert Storm. I would expect that we could put together something.”

“Let’s see,” Herb began, “Your name is...”

“Cole, Herb, Randy Cole.”

“If Don has no objections,” Herb responded, “Why don’t you and I get together after the meeting to discuss this.”

“I have no problem with that,” Don said.

Randy just nodded his head in the affirmative.

“The next point that I would like to bring up is the fact that this compound butts up against a National Forest,” Herb continued. “We had better consider having foot patrols on our west flank.”

“I’ll take care of that Herb,” Derek announced.

“Did anyone take a good look at the bodies of those cons?” Herb asked.

“I did,” Damon replied.

“What did you see Damon,” Herb asked.

“Those flechettes,” Damon responded, “Pretty well chewed them up. However, I doubt that all of the wounds were fatal.”

“What are you suggesting?” Herb asked.

“Well...” Damon began, “I would suggest that we start with slugs or buckshot depending upon the range and only resort to the flechettes when they are close in.”

“Ok,” Herb responded, “When I reload the shotgun shells, I’ll limit myself to buck and slugs.”

“Herb,” Don commented, “When we received those M-16’s from the military, they were all selective fire weapons. We changed the sears and made them semi-auto only, but we saved the parts. Should we convert them back to full auto?”

“Oh hell no!” Derek replied. “That would get us to ‘spray and pray’ and waste a lot of ammo. Directed fire is far more effective. If those weapons could be converted to 3 round burst, I expect it would be harder to make my point. However, I was finally able to convince my father that in a situation where the ammo supply is limited, automatic weapons would be a mistake. That’s my two cents worth.”

Several other topics were discussed and the meeting broke up. Herb, Randy and several of the deputies gathered in one corner of the room to discuss setting up LRRP’s. Derek set out to gather a group of the young people who had shown real promise in the training being offered and established near-in foot patrols in the woods to the west.

July 7th, The Ark, 2 pm...

So far so good; Herb and Randy had selected six deputies to join with them and they formed two 4-man patrol units. Derek had assembled three groups of young people and had recruited two deputies who had Desert Storm experience but who had not been selected for the LRRP units. He and the two men would be the squad leaders and they would maintain continuous foot patrols in the woods.

Someone had the bright idea that, had they had the opportunity, they should go to Pueblo and find as many motion sensors as they could. Perhaps, it was suggested, the motion sensors would be rewired and a panel mounted with lights displaying when a motion sensor was tripped. The foot patrols could, in that case, be converted to rapid response teams.

Meanwhile, the ladies had gathered to have a baby shower for Jan who was now showing prominently. Two of the deputies’ wives were also expecting. The ladies had taken over the main room at Central for the shower. They had cookies and coffee and tea and were having a great time. Some of the deputies’ wives had very young children and Jan received many presents of carefully cleaned and pressed hand me down clothing. Myrna presented Jan with a large bundle of old fashioned cloth diapers. Life, it seemed went on and the ladies were determined to maintain as much normalcy as possible.

Chapter Thirty-nine – Second Attack

July 10th, 8:00 am, The Ark...

There had been no further attacks on *The Ark*. Don was itching to get up to Pueblo to retrieve his cached supplies, but he restrained himself. He admitted to himself that despite his years of law enforcement experience, the current situation represented something for which he was ill prepared.

Damon had found an old motion sensor and taken it apart. Given his Navy ET training, he examined the components carefully and determined that with the addition of a small relay in place of the speaker, he could create a device that might prove to be of useful to the group.

Herb and Randy were anxious to begin the LRRP's. They initially proposed to move out to a range about 4-5 miles from the farm and circle it. They calculated the distance and discovered that if they ranged out five miles, the total travel distance would be almost 30 miles. That was simply too great of a distance to cover on foot with only two patrols. They were certain that there was a better approach to the problem, but hadn't yet arrived at a solution.

Derek and the two deputies began their close in patrols. They decided on a 4-on 8-off rotation. They would only be a mile beyond the farm and felt that they could maintain the schedule indefinitely. A fourth team of alternates was selected and they would provide fill-in's if anyone were hurt or became sick. They would also serve as a ready reaction force for the roving vehicular patrols.

Damon was explaining his proposed motion detector system to Herb, Don and a couple of deputies. Several questions were raised including where they could get motion detectors, the relays to modify the detectors, the amount of wire required (miles of wire) and so forth. Damon dug out an old Radio Shack catalog and showed the men several relays that could be adapted. Don suggested that the phone company would probably have spools of wire that they could use/adapt. One of the deputies commented that what they really need was an eye in the sky. His hobby was radio controlled model airplanes.

The deputy, Lloyd Campbell, had several airplanes back at his home in Pueblo. He said, "If we could just find a really small CCD camera, we could use one of my planes or we could raid the model shop. We will have to go to the model shop anyway; I don't have a lot of fuel at home."

Don jumped into the discussion, "You know, we have been evaluating several cameras from an outfit called SCS, Inc. for our detectives. If I recall correctly, one of the cameras is a tiny little camera that works in near complete darkness. We also have some cameras with wireless transmitters, but they have a limited range of about 300'. Now, what if we could rig the little camera to a radio with say a 5-mile range? Lloyd, do you have a

plane big enough to handle the weight?”

“I don’t Sheriff,” Lloyd responded, “But they do at the model store. They have one I’ve been drooling over with a 4’ wingspan. Of course, the smaller the radio, the smaller the plane.”

The agreed that the next time they ventured up to Pueblo, they would check out the model shop, Radio Shack, the telephone company for wire, and any other places they might find motion detectors. They had been talking all morning and they broke for lunch. They were developing some good ideas. Maybe if they could get the model airplane working, it would solve the problem that Randy and Herb had.

Gary was sitting in the radio shack, scanning for another conversation.

“Hey partner,” Ron called to him as he dragged in a chair and plopped down, “What’s new out in the world?”

“The SARS epidemic is over,” Gary said, “Every day some Ham mentions that power has been restored locally. Our prison breaks aren’t an isolated incident. Apparently gangs of men, and women, most of them escaped inmates, are roving the country stripping cities, armories, taking anything and everything they can find that’s of use to them. I heard a report that a small town in Illinois was wiped out by a gang of thugs. It would seem that the military is under gunned and under staffed. Cheney has issued shoot on sight orders in an effort to control the gangs.”

“Dang,” Ron replied, “It’s that bad, huh?”

“I overheard some of the discussion going on in the main room this morning,” Gary continued. “Don is really chomping at the bit to get up to Pueblo.” Gary outlined Damon’s plan and mentioned what the deputy, Lloyd, had proposed.

“I suppose that we can maybe risk one more trip to pick up what we need,” Gary said, “But, after that Ron, I think that we had better stop traveling to Pueblo for a while.”

“I agree partner,” Ron replied, “I’ll get with Don, Herb and some of the other fellas and we’ll make up the final list.”

Ron talked to Don, Lloyd, Damon and finally Herb. “What do you think of the various things you discussed this morning, Herb,” Ron asked.

“Ron, Damon’s plan with the motion sensors makes sense, but it has its drawbacks,” Herb replied. “It will be a lot of work to install all that wire and every critter out in the woods could potentially set them off. I know that we can adjust for that to some extent by adjusting the sensitivity and mounting the sensors higher, but, I’m not sure it’s worth the work involved.”

"The model airplane idea," Herb continued, "Is brilliant. If we can put together the camera/radio setup and get a plane with some loitering time, we can run the plane or planes 24/7. I'm sure that a few of the teenagers would jump at a chance to 'play' with model airplanes. Of course, Damon would have to rig a receiver and screen, but I think that it could work."

"And Herb," Ron asked. "What is your opinion of making one more trip to Pueblo?"

"I think that we're going to have to risk it," Herb responded. "We need more gasoline for the generators for the trailers; we need the model airplane stuff; we have 3 pregnant women and should try to round up disposable diapers, if possible; of course, there's Don's cache to pick up; if we make the trip, it had better last one for a while."

"Ok Herb, set it up for tomorrow morning, early," Ron replied.

July 11th, 5:00 am, The Ark...

Herb had decided to pull the 30' trailer with one of the pickups and not use the 5-ton trucks. They set out at 5:15 with 5 pickups and the empty gasoline delivery truck. The convoy consisted of two lead vehicles, the Thumper truck carrying 10 drums of buck and 10 drums of slugs, the delivery truck, and was followed up by two pickups. Their first stop was the Sheriff's station where Don hurriedly gathered the surveillance equipment.

They then went to the model store and Lloyd and a deputy ran in. They came out moments later, Lloyd carrying the 2 boxes containing unassembled planes and a bag full of engines. They returned to the shop and began lugging out cases filled with cans of fuel. A couple of men jumped out of the trucks and ran to help them. Three men returned carrying boxes of fuel and Lloyd came out carrying a couple of shopping bags containing materials he would need to assemble the planes.

Their next stop was a Wal-Mart super store. As rapidly as they could, they loaded package after package of disposable diapers into the trailer. The next to last stop was a fuel depot. Two over the road fuel tankers were parked in the fill area. They quickly checked and determined that both tankers were full. They abandoned the gasoline delivery truck and finally got both tankers started. Don directed them to a storage facility and working rapidly, the men transferred Don's cache to the pickups. They saddled up and headed back toward *The Ark*. About five miles from *The Ark*, the lead vehicle driven by Ron and carrying Herb and Derek, skidded to a halt. Herb grabbed the CB mike and called The Ark.

"Ark, this is Herb," he said, "I hear gunfire, what's the situation there?"

"Herb," a voice replied, "We're under attack. We pulled in to the main compound and are returning fire. There must be 50 or more of them. We're holding our own, but we could use some help."

Herb directed that the first two pickups and Thumper circle behind the attackers. Derek took over the gunner's role and inserted a magazine of slugs. They drove rapidly to the compound and Derek began turning the crank. The cons, concentrating on the compound, were unaware of their impending doom until they began dropping. Derek reloaded Thumper with 00 buck. On the second pass, the 00 buck tore through the startled cons, ripping them to shreds.

They turned for a third pass and Derek inserted another drum of 00 buck. With each pass of the trucks the firing from the compound halted. They made their third and final pass, Derek clearly reaching the level of 600 rounds-per-minute. The trucks stopped and the firing from the compound resumed. Derek grabbed his FAL and motioned for the gunner to resume his role.

Herb instructed the compound to cease-fire. Derek, Herb and the passenger from the third pickup gingerly walked toward the mound of bodies, pumping bullets into anyone or anything that moved. Herb then got on the radio and instructed the vehicles waiting on the road to get a move on since the situation was under control.

The two tankers and the two pickups rushed to the compound as people flooded from the compound to join their rescuers. Chris came driving a 5-ton truck and the bodies were loaded on the truck, hauled to the northeast corner of the property and unceremoniously dumped in the ditch.

Later that afternoon, after the trailer and pickups had been unloaded most of the residents assemble in the main room, Central.

Herb was standing at the front of the room, his face crimson.

"I realize that you people here in the compound had the situation well in hand," he said slowly, "You hadn't even resorted to the dynamite. I take full responsibility for what happened today. If we hadn't needed to expand our security options and secure fuel and a few other things, we would not have made the trip. For a second time, we have been most fortunate.

"The first attack was from a group of about 30 people. I counted almost 60 bodies as they were being loaded aboard the truck. Not one of our people suffered so much as a scratch. From this point forward, we will remain on a heightened state of alert. Just as soon as we can get the airborne surveillance implemented, we will begin the LRRP's. We will discontinue the patrols in the woods and will mount vehicular patrols to our north, east and south using the existing roads. However, while you are making those patrols, open every gate to every farm field you come to, I want us to have off-road capacity if the situation requires."

Herb paused to let his message sink in. "Until Gary reports that the radio traffic indicates that the military has gotten the upper hand, no one, and I mean no one, except for the

patrols, will venture beyond this farm. If we don't have it, we will have to do without it." He paused again, smiled and continued, "Ladies, we have a lifetime supply of disposable diapers. I'm sorry that we didn't have time to shop for candy or perfume." He laughed.

"What do you mean candy or perfume, Herb Johnson?" Jan retorted her hands on her swelling belly, "What we really needed was some gardening gloves!"

The room broke out into spontaneous laughter. When things began to calm down a little, Herb said, "I'd heard reports that you were spunky, Jan, now I know they're true. Would anyone besides me be up for a barbeque this evening?"

Herb's question occasioned applause from the assembly. The ladies rushed to prepare salads and the fixings. Ron left only to return with two cases of cold longnecks. Thumper was cleaned and moved to the cupola. The magazines were reloaded and moved to there as well. Herb doubled the guard and made arrangements for the guards to be spelled so that they too could enjoy the barbeque. Unlike the previous barbeque where the folks had met Don's family, the mood was pleasant, but somber.

July 12th, 8:00 am, in the security office at Central...

"I'm getting old," Ron thought, "There was a day when I could drink half a case of beer without a problem. Let's see, I only had 3 beers last night and still, I have a headache."

"Good Morning Ron," Cheerfully greeted his friend.

"Morning Clarence," Ron moaned.

"Was the matter Ron, drink 3 beers again?" Clarence asked laughing.

"I'm getting too old for this crap," Ron announced.

"That deputy stayed up all night working on the first plane," Clarence replied. "He says that it will be ready to fly tomorrow."

"Good, that will mean that Herb and Randy can start the LRRP's," Ron smiled. "Get him out of our hair once in a while."

"Ron, that Gatling gun of Gary's has saved our butts twice now," Clarence commented, "Maybe we should give him award or something."

"I heard that," Gary called from the radio shack laughing.

"Ron, I'm going to get on over to the rifle range," Clarence said rising and turning to leave, "I was shooting yesterday, but I don't think I hit a single one of those cons."

“See you later, partner,” Ron called after Clarence.

Ron rose, grabbed the coffee pot and walked into the radio shack. “Here’s your award partner,” he said, pouring Gary another cup of coffee.

Ron returned to the security room and put his feet up on the desk. “I’ve always wanted to do that,” he thought.

The radio squawked, “We need Ron Green at the front gate!”

Chapter Forty – Security

Ron grabbed a pickup and drove up to the front gate. As he neared the gate, he observed two people standing next to bicycles. He parked the pickup, got out and approached the two people.

“Hi Dad,” the woman called out in a tired voice.

“Paula?” Ron asked, not recognizing his daughter.

“It’s us Dad,” Paula responded.

“But how?” Ron asked, noting that she had lost maybe 30-40 pounds, “And where...”

Ron rushed to embrace his daughter. Then he embraced his son-in-law. He openly cried tears of joy. Ron decided to hold his questions. They loaded the two mountain bikes onto the back of the pickup and he drove them back to the compound. Then led them to the home which he and Linda occupied.

“Linda!” he shouted, “Look who’s here!”

“Paula, Robert!” Linda exclaimed.

Ron got on the phone and called Jennifer and Brenda. He then went back to the boys’ room and woke Kevin and John. The family slowly assembled. Linda fixed a quick breakfast and Paula and Robert wolfed it down. Paula went to bathe and Robert filled the folks in on their adventure.

“We lost our phone service early on,” Robert began, “When your mother had her heart attack, we weren’t able to call for aid and she passed on. Sorry Ron. Anyway, I scrounged up a couple of gas cans and filled them and the car. We spent about three weeks accumulating the supplies we would need to make the trip. Then, we set out. We should have had enough gas to get most of the way here, but with one thing and another, we barely made it into South Dakota before we ran out of gas.”

Robert paused as a refreshed Paula joined him. Robert left to bathe and shave off his beard and Paula picked up the story.

“It was tough going Dad,” she continued. “Some days we barely made five miles, others we made up to 35-40. Anyway, we slowly worked our way here. We avoided towns and people. We made our way about halfway across South Dakota, and then turned south. When we hit I-80, we paralleled it and then paralleled I-76. East of Denver, we ran into trouble. I hit a rut in the road, fell, and sprained my ankle. We lay over until I could ride again. And then, we worked our way here.”

“But, what did you do for food?” Ron asked.

“Dad if I never see another lifeboat ration as long as I live,” Paula smiled, “It will be too soon.”

Meanwhile, over at Central, Lloyd proudly displayed his new plane.

“Chris fashioned a large fuel tank for me,” Lloyd explained. “Damon gutted a handheld radio and rigged it to the camera. This is a Mini Telemaster. It was designed to run on an electric motor, but I modified it to use a regular fuel powered model engine. Actually, I also picked up a sailplane called a Skimmer 400. However, I’ve never flown one of those and the Telemaster was easier to construct. Shall we go see if it will fly?”

Damon remained in the security room glued to the monitor he had connected to the receiver. Lloyd and the others went out to make the maiden voyage of the model airplane. Damon began to receive a signal when Lloyd turned on the camera, “Damn, not bad,” Damon thought.

Over the course of the afternoon, they experimented with fuel loads and the like, developing the optimum combination. The little plane would fly for quite a while on a single fuel load. When it returned to refuel, they could refuel it, swap out the batteries and have it airborne in just a few minutes.

Herb and Randy had been busy, too. They had 6 of the Sheriff’s M-16’s converted back to selective fire. Randy had a Super Match M1A rifle that was outfitted with 6-20x50 Mil Dot Springfield scope. It had belonged to the Sheriff’s Department and had been replaced by a Remington M-40. He also had a silencer for the rifle and second-generation night optics. Each LRRP would have one silenced sniper rifle with day and night optics and 3 select fire M-16’s. They managed to locate enough Camelback hydration systems to outfit each team member and a couple of Katadyn Mini Ceramic Filters.

Damon presented them with two 45-watt business radios rigged with battery packs. He said that, depending on conditions the radios could have a range of up to 30-40 miles. Don had 4 large Alice packs, as did Herb. The men broke down their MRE’s, equipped each pack with several bandoleers of spare .223 ammo and they were set. Herb and Randy would carry their sniper rifles, 60 rounds of match grade .308 JHP ammo and a Remington 870 with a 14” barrel and pistol grip together with a mixture of slugs, 00 buck and flechette ammo. When they had the packs assembled, they weighed well over 70 pounds.

“Dang,” Herb thought, “Between the packs, web mounted gear and weapons, we will be hauling 100 pounds. This is just like being back in the SEALs, and I’m not as young as I used to be, nor as fit.”

Herb and Randy agreed on a schedule where each LRRP would travel out for 4 days then return to the compound in the remaining 3 days. The second team would depart the day before the other team was due back. In this way, they could maintain a LRRP in

the field at all times. They established radio check in times and a simple set of code words. While it didn't seem likely that any bad guys would have business frequency radios, why take a chance? Damon installed two 45-watt business frequency radios in the radio shack and it was agreed that someone would staff the shack 24/7.

While Damon was installing the radios, Gary 'grilled' him. "Damon, where did you come up with the business radios?"

"Dad," Damon began, "The one time I was in Pueblo on a scrounging trip, I came across a Plumbing contractor's place of business. I noticed that each truck had a radio. So, I stripped the radios and antennas from the trucks. I picked up quite a few. Hell, I even broke into the place and got the base station. It's a 4-channel radio. I couldn't get the base station antenna; it was way up on a tower. So, I rigged a truck antenna on a 20' pipe and mounted it on top of the cupola. It's far from perfect, but we should be able to maintain comms with everyone.

"Look, set a scanner to this frequency," Damon said handing Gary a piece of paper. All of the radios are on the same frequency, but I adjusted the internal switches so that the LRRP's are on one sub frequency AB, and Derek's pickups are on sub frequency CD. The scanner ignores the sub frequencies. Anyway, since you can't have two base stations on two sub frequencies at the same time, you can monitor the scanner and switch channel on the base station to the appropriate channel to communicate."

A short time later, three of the teenagers, a boy and two girls appeared at the door of the radio shack. One of the girls, Cindy, explained that Damon had sought them out because of their interest in Ham radio.

"Jan would love this," Gary thought and promptly began instructing the teenagers in the usage of the radio equipment.

July 13th, early morning, The Ark...

Derek sent out the first vehicle patrol. Over his objections, 3 more of the M-16's had been returned to their selective fire state. The driver of each vehicle would have a .308 caliber rifle and the passenger a selective fire M-16 and a box of loaded magazines. Instructions were given to assess the enemy from a distance and avoid contact at all costs.

Randy and his squad were in better physical condition than Herb, so Randy led the first LRRP. Herb began a regimen of exercise that he hoped would get him into condition for his first patrol. The LRRP would check in every 4 hours giving only their designation, e.g., "Team 1."

With Team 1 approaching the San Isabel National Forest...

The group had moved very slowly. The point man was a former Army ranger. Both of

the men with Randy were former infantry, one a marine, one army. They broke for lunch and rested for a while. Two of the men took a cigarette, broke it in half and had a short smoke.

“Bad form,” Randy thought, “You can smell smoke for quite a way out here in the boonies.” He shook his head at the men and they immediately snubbed out their cigarettes and field stripped the butts. They resumed their trek into the NF. About an hour later, the point man halted and raised a closed fist. Everyone stopped. Randy moved up to the point man, took out his binoculars and looked in the direction the point man was pointing.

Randy saw 4 makeshift Hogan’s. There was a man skinning a deer hanging from a tree. A compound bow rested up against the tree. The other two men joined Randy and the point man. For the next two hours, they kept watch of the group. When the time came for radio check-in, they fired up the radio and Randy gave his report.

“Team 1, contact,” Randy said into the mike. “Four families, November-Bravo-Golf (Not Bad Guys) at...” Randy gave their location from his GPS.

“10-4, Team 1, avoid contact and resume patrol,” the voice answered.

“Team 1, 10-4” Randy replied and turned off the radio.

The LRRP continued until dark, not making further contact. When they stopped, they ate their MRE’s and struck up a very hushed conversation recounting what they had seen that day. Randy reached into his pack and removed two packs of Nicorette gum, tossing a pack to each of the, now grateful, infantrymen.

Randy turned on the radio and said, “Team 1, 10-7 (Out of service - radio off) at...” giving their location.

“Team 1, 10-4,” a voice acknowledged.

The men settled in for the night, maintaining a watch with one man awake and the others sleeping. Around dawn, the men woke, ate breakfast and refilled their Camelbacks from a nearby stream using the Katadyn filter. Randy checked in on the radio, “Team 1 10-8, at 12:15 Zulu.”

“Team 1, 10-4, 10-8 at 12:15 Zulu,” a voice acknowledged.

The team moved on. Just before noon, the point man raised his fist and Randy joined him. A group perhaps numbering as many as 150 were camped about 500 yards ahead. Randy quickly surveyed the group and turned on the radio.

“Team 1, Bravo Golf One Five Zero at...” Randy read the GPS location into the radio.

“10-4 Team 1, maintain surveillance,” the voice replied.

Randy and the men settled down to observe the large, wildly unorganized, noisy group. Over the course of the next day, it became apparent that the group was poorly armed. They had perhaps a dozen AR's, a few shotguns, some nightsticks and some clubs fashioned from tree branches. At 4-hour intervals, Randy updated *The Ark* on their observations.

Upon giving the final report, Randy received the following acknowledgement, “10-4 Team 1, Romeo-Tango-Bravo, confer with first group and, if appropriate, invite them to *The Ark*, I say again, confer with first group and, if appropriate, invite them to *The Ark*.”

“Team 1, 10-4,” Randy replied and turned off the radio.

Randy retraced their steps, and returned to the location of the first group.

“Hello the camp,” Randy called out, “We’re friendlies may I speak with you?”

“Who are you?” a voice demanded.

“We are a patrol from *The Ark*,” Randy replied. My name is Randy Cole and I am a Pueblo County Deputy Sheriff.”

“Ok deputy, you can approach, but no funny business or sudden moves, we’re armed,” a man called out.

Randy handed his rifle to the point man, stood, raised his hands and made his way to the camp.

When he reached the camp, the man called from behind a tree. “Do you have any ID, deputy?”

Randy slowly removed his ID from his shirt pocket and tossed it to the man. The man took the ID, looked at the picture, and then back at Randy.

“I guess you’re who you say you are,” the man stated, “What do you want with us?”

Randy took a seat on a stump and quickly filled the assembled group in on the fact that there was a large group of ‘unfriendly people’ just a few miles to the west. Randy scanned the group, recognizing some of the people. Searching his memory, he suddenly remembered where he knew them from and why he recognized them.

A couple of years earlier, there had been a domestic disturbance at a housing tract just outside of Pueblo. These folks had called the Sheriff’s Department and had intervened before the deputies had arrived. He didn’t see the couple that had been the source of the disturbance among the group. These people had subsequently organized a neigh-

borhood watch. He invited them to *The Ark*.

Asked them if they ever heard of those 'screwballs from California'. Several people nodded their heads in the affirmative. Those people turned out to be really nice folks Randy explained. In fact a sizable portion of the Sheriff's Department had joined them at their farm. The group discussed the matter among them and finally agreed to go meet the 'screwballs from California'. Randy called his men in using his handheld and, when they arrived, fired up the business radio.

"Team 1, Romeo-Tango-Bravo plus 15," he said.

"Team 1, Romeo-Tango-Bravo plus 15, 10-4," a voice acknowledged.

Chapter Forty-one – Rules of Engagement

July 15th, 4:00 pm, The Ark...

Randy and his team, plus the 15 newcomers, arrived back at *The Ark* around 4:00 pm. He quickly filled the Sheriff in on who the people were. Don, in turn, filled Herb, Ron, Clarence, Gary and Fred in on the identity of the newcomers. The newcomers were made welcome and invited to use two of the vacant houses to clean up and refresh themselves and a meeting was announced for 7:00 pm.

The ladies gathered the groups' dirty clothes, and set off to wash them for the newcomers. Some of the clothing had seen better days and was not washed. The women also prepared a hot meal for the folks and the people were most grateful to eat 'regular' food again.

Main room, 7:00 pm...

"Settle down people," Ron called loudly in his booming voice.

The room became silent.

"For those of you who have not met them, I'd like to introduce my daughter Paula and her husband Robert," Ron began.

Paula and Robert stood waved and promptly sat down.

"I'll let these folks introduce themselves," he continued.

The newcomers rose as a group. The leader of the group said, "Hello, my name is Paul Harris, this is my wife Nancy and these are my children, Paul, David and Mark."

The second man spoke, "I'm Ralph Harris and this is my wife Mary. We're Paul's parents.

The third man spoke, "I'm Don Cummings and this is my wife Ann. The girls are our daughters Lynn and Amy."

Before the last man could speak, his wife said, "And, I am Janice Burns, this is my husband William, Bill, and these are our children Billy and Rosalie."

Out of the corner of his eye, Ron thought he saw Jan nudge Fred and raise a fist briefly.

"Unless I hear any objections," Ron said, "Based on information Don has supplied about these folks, we are going to invite these folks to join our group."

The group broke in to quiet conversation, but no one objected.

“Paul, we’ll meet after the meeting and answer any questions you folks have,” Ron said.

“Moving on people,” Ron continued, “Randy and his LRRP located a large group of cons west of here. Apparently, the group is disorganized and poorly armed. People I am not a bloodthirsty person. However, that group could mean trouble for us. And, as the expression goes, the best defense is a good offense.”

Ron paused to let the import of his words register with the assembly.

“Hey,” a voice came from the group, “You’re not suggesting...”

“That we get them before they get us?” Ron finished the sentence. “Yes, I am.”

“Baaaaaaaa,” Ron thought to himself. “People, they used to hang horse thieves. Our society has changed to the point where a convicted kidnapper gets out of prison after 23 years and immediately kidnaps and kills again.”

Ron was referring to the Dru Sjodin case. “If you folks remember, Alphonso Rodriguez Jr., a 50 year-old male from Crookston, Minnesota, was taken into custody on the evening of December 1, 2003. And he was charged with kidnapping, a class A felony in the state of North Dakota. Rodriguez was a level three-registered sex offender in the state of Minnesota.

“I remember an interview on Larry King Live back when we still had TV,” he continued. “Animals like that Rodriguez character don’t belong on our streets, in my opinion. He had a fair trial, but perhaps the punishment didn’t fit the crime.”

The room erupted. Ron decided to let them talk for a little while and deal with his suggestion. After about 20 minutes, he called the meeting back to order.

“Randy, did you see anyone who was not armed in some fashion or another?” Ron asked.

“Not one Ron,” Randy replied.

The other members of the LRRP nodded in agreement.

“In your opinion as a law enforcement officer,” Ron continued, “If there were enough firearms for the entire group, would the entire group be armed with firearms.”

“Oh yeah,” Randy responded.

“If we leave the group alone,” Ron continued, “What would be your expectations for the future?”

“I’d expect them to attack this compound, eventually.” Randy replied.

There was that ‘you could hear a pin drop’ thing again. The silence was deafening.

“Ok, do I hear ANY objection to allowing Herb, Randy and myself to decide how this should be handled?” Ron asked.

“Ron, you’d better include me, John, Fred, Clarence, Chris and Don into that decision making group,” Gary strongly suggested. “That will serve a couple of purposes but primarily the sharing of the responsibility among a larger group of persons. And, if any of the women want to join in the discussion, I’d say let them.”

“Ok partner,” Ron replied, “We’ll do it that way.”

The meeting broke up. Ron talked with Paul and the other newcomers. They wanted in. Ron directed Derek to issue the captured AR-15’s to the newcomers and directed another person to round up some of the jeans and shirts that they had recovered from the clothing store for the newcomers.

The meeting to discuss the final decision didn’t last long. The lone woman who had stayed was Jan. In her typical fashion, she told them that they had better make sure that nothing happened to her baby, turned on her heel and left.

“Ok, does that settle it for everyone?” Ron asked after Jan was out of earshot.

Randy spoke up next, “I guess you noticed the Realtree cammo clothing the LRRP was wearing? Well, among us,” he said referring to his fellow deputies, “I guess that we have 40 or so sets of cammo clothing. Some of you folks just don’t meet the Department’s height/weight guidelines, so I can’t help you.

“But, we have some military surplus sniper veil/body covers. They are 60” by 100” so they should pretty much cover your whole body. If we’re going to do this, I’d suggest that we suspend the vehicle patrols for a day and Derek and his group can provide security for the compound. There is no way we can hump Thumper with us, so they should be ok.”

July 16th, 5:00 am, The Ark...

About 50 men and older boys gathered waiting for instructions. Two of the newcomers, Paul and Bill were also there. They explained that they were experienced hunters and could take direction. Herb and Randy were in charge and instructed the men that they would move in from the east, form a quarter circle and attack.

The deputies would fire on the men with firearms; the rest could fire on targets of opportunity. Don was there, but made no effort to interfere; he could take orders just as well as the rest. They moved out heading west. Moving quickly at first and slower as they

came nearer to the convicts, they used only hand signals, maintaining the best possible noise discipline.

They reached the encampment just after 1:00 pm. The men fanned out, assumed a prone position and waited for the deputies to begin firing. Suddenly a hail of gunfire shattered the calm of the forest. In a matter of minutes, 150, more or less, murderers, rapists, armed robbers and other criminals lay on the forest floor. They walked among the bodies, finishing the job of sending the cons to meet their maker. The criminals had paid the ultimate penalty for their criminal behavior. They gathered the firearms and anything of value and returned to *The Ark*, leaving the bodies lying where they fell.

When they returned to *The Ark*, Ron didn't see any missing people and the men were carrying extra AR's and shotguns. It still bothered him a little, very little, but what the hell, someone had told him that in a similar situation, one piece of advice remained in his mind:

They are civilians defending themselves against brigands! Rules of War do not apply to civilian Self-Defense! Waste the SOB's! Preemptive strike by LRRPS is highly encouraged!

If I were defending an area in a SHTF situation, and heard that escaped cons were massing for an attack, if I could preempt their attack by engaging them from long distance, or even sneaking into their camp and slitting a few throats- it would be not only ethical but moral since your actions are in defense of the innocent (women and children at your compound)!

They hadn't risked getting anyone hurt by sneaking in and slitting throats. They had not only preempted the attack, they had prevented the possibility totally. All in all, not a bad days work.

July 17th, 9:00 am, The Ark...

Lloyd had finally finished the sailplane and was learning to fly it. He had stuffed all of the 6-cell motor batteries the plane could hold in the fuselage, leaving only room for the radio and CCD camera. Once he learned to fly the plane, his main problem would be that the plane could stay airborne far longer than the radio batteries had life. On the other hand, it didn't use the engine fuel that was being exhausted faster than he had expected. And, they weren't planning on going to Pueblo anytime soon.

Ron was sitting in the security office when Clarence came in and sat down.

"Morning partner," Ron said.

"Good Morning Ron," Clarence smiled cheerfully, "How are you this fine day?"

"Just great, Clarence, and you?" Ron asked.

"I feel like I am on top of the world today," Clarence replied.

Gary walked in, "Good morning Ron, Clarence," he said.

"Gary! How are you?" Clarence greeted him,

"Hey partner," Ron said, "What's new?"

"It would seem that the military is finally getting a handle on the situation," Gary replied, "Now if some nut-job General like the one Bruce Willis played in the movie *Siege* doesn't crop up, I do believe things might just work out."

"Oh?" Ron inquired, "Why do you believe that?"

"On the net," Gary replied referring to the Ham Radio Net, "I'm hearing a lot of good things. Almost the entire Congress, House and Senate, was wiped out, mostly due to radiation sickness. So was much of the federal Bureaucracy. An effort is being made to put together an election for this November, starting at the grass-roots level. The SARS epidemic killed a lot of the liberals living in big cities, so I'm guessing that we will have a far more conservative electorate. I'm even hearing talk of proposed Constitutional amendments to reinforce the Bill of Rights."

"Interesting," Clarence commented.

"It turns out that I had some incomplete information," Gary continued, "According to one fella on the radio, the US population was 281,421,906 according to the 2000 census. The death tolls from SARS, rioting and the military cleanup comes to just shy of 150,000,000. That means we lost half of our population. Europe was harder hit than the US and there is some speculation, no real knowledge you know, that the Chinese lost up to $\frac{3}{4}$ of their population. I even heard that India lost $\frac{3}{4}$ of their population."

"Do you hear anything from the Middle East?" Ron asked.

"Yes and no," Gary laughed, "I hear it, but I don't understand the language."

"Herb ran into the security office shouting, "Red Alert!"

Chapter Forty-two – Military Intervention

The men jumped to their feet.

“What’s up Herb,” Ron demanded, “Are we under attack?”

“No, not yet anyway,” Herb replied, “One of the guards reported that a military convoy is headed this way. She said it had 4 Hummer’s and 4 large trucks.”

“Get Don, Herb,” Ron tried to think fast, “We’ll send a small delegation to the front gate and find out what the Army wants.”

Ron, Clarence and Gary calmly left to get in a pickup to go to the front gate. They had to wait about 5 minutes for Don to appear. When he did, two deputies, in uniform, accompanied him. The six men climbed into Mary’s pickup and drove to the front gate. When they arrived, the convoy was parked on the road and two soldiers stood visiting with the guards.

Don said, “Let me do the talking.” He and the two deputies led the way, followed closely by Ron, Clarence and Gary.

“I’m Pueblo County Sheriff Don Constantine,” Don introduced himself to the Captain, “Can we help you gents?”

“Sheriff Constantine,” the Captain spoke, “I’m Captain James Baker. We are part of the 10th Mountain Division. Would you mind if I dismounted my men and let them stretch their legs?”

“I suppose not, Captain,” Don replied.

“Sergeant,” Captain Baker ordered, “Dismount the men and have them stand easy but remain alert.”

The Sergeant replied, “Sir,” and left to carry out his instructions.

Captain Baker explained that this platoon was but a small portion of a larger force in the Colorado area. They were doing their best to restore order, but it was an uphill battle. While Don and Captain Baker visited, Ron, Gary and Clarence went out to greet the soldiers.

“Can I help you men?” the Sergeant, his nametag said Brown, inquired.

“Sergeant Brown?” Ron replied, “I’m Ron Green, This old fart is Gary Olsen and the rather distinguish gentleman is Clarence Rawlings. We just wanted to thank the soldiers for the fine job they’re doing.”

Sergeant Brown's face broke into a wide smile. "They get little thanks," he said, "They'll appreciate that."

The men moved from group to group, shaking hands, patting the soldiers on the back and making small talk. The soldiers looked tired and although most were obviously in their late teens or early twenties, their eyes gave them away. They were old beyond their years. When the men finished thanking the soldiers, they returned to where Don and Captain Baker stood.

"... so if you are returning to Pueblo," Don was telling the Captain, "Swing by my office and pick up a radio. You can keep us updated. We will follow your advice Captain and maintain our guard."

When they climbed back into Mary's pickup, Ron grabbed a mike and said, "Herb, stand down from Red Alert!"

The soldiers remounted their trucks and the convoy proceeded on to the south. The men returned to the compound and gathered in Central to let Don bring them up to speed. When they were settled, Don began.

"Fellas," Don said, "Perhaps Gary's radio reports are too optimistic. He had the death toll about right, but it is still climbing, primarily due to secondary diseases, the inadequacy and unavailability of medical treatment and the ongoing warfare carried on by the bands of convicts rooming the country.

"There were over 2 million men, women and children behind bars on or about June 1, 2003. Apparently, most of the prisoners survived the SARS outbreak. Since our overall population was cut in half, that means that our criminal population as a proportion of the overall population nearly doubled. Captain Baker said that the military is playing hell rounding up the criminals."

"How did the military make out?" Ron asked, "Did a lot of them die off as well?"

"Fewer than one might have thought," Don replied, "When it became apparent that the US was facing a pandemic, they started wearing their M-40s.

"On the subject of the military," Don continued, "I'm pleased to announce that the US no longer has any military on foreign soil. And, faced with staggering losses of their own populations, the UN delegates, those that survived anyway, disbanded the UN, at least for the moment. It seems that, as the states go, our neighbor to the west, Utah, lost the least of its population. The major cities around the country lost most of their populations, with New York and California being the hardest hit."

Don continued to share what he'd learned from the Captain. When he'd shared all that he could recall, he summed up, "In short people, it will be quite a while before utilities and the like are restored to cities like Pueblo. I think that I can safely say that this coun-

try, indeed the world, has regressed a century or more.”

Monday, August 1, 2005, morning, The Ark...

After much trial and error, Lloyd had arrived at an optimum setup for the sailplane. He'd removed several of the batteries he had originally installed for the engine. Damon had cannibalized a cell phone and rigged a radio using the parts. They had ended up with an airplane that could remain aloft virtually for days at a time. However, the radio time was still limited to about 12 hours despite Damon's best efforts. Derek's group continued the vehicular patrols and Randy and Herb continued the LRRP's. No further attacks had occurred.

The community began to settle into a routine. The ladies were harvesting the vegetables from the garden and were canning on a daily basis. To ensure a level of readiness, random drills were now being conducted. Everyone was becoming skilled in the use of firearms. Jan was due any day now. Despite her condition, Jan practiced regularly and was arguably the best shot in the group, which now numbered over 150. John had harvested the first cutting of alfalfa and the other crops were doing excellent.

10:00 am, main room, Central...

Several of the residents, mostly men, were gathered in the main room.

The gasoline-powered generators used to power the mobile homes were failing due to their continued use. Despite routine maintenance by Chris and Matt, the units were beginning to wear out. The diesel units powering the homes weren't faring much better.

Herb explained that they were slowly transferring more and more of the load to the wind turbines. However, he warned, there were 24 mobile homes and 10 houses dependent on outside electrical sources. The wind turbines could only sustain 100kw, not the nearly 260kw those homes required. They should have installed 6, not 2 wind turbines. Of course, the backup diesel generator was rated at 375kw continuous output, but it burned a lot of fuel. They had a real dilemma.

“Don?” Clarence asked, “Do you suppose that the military would object if we went on a scavenging trip?”

“I'd have to ask them Clarence,” Don replied, “What did you have in mind?”

“Well,” Clarence replied, “I was thinking that if we could get up to Colorado Springs, we could try and locate that roofing contractor; you know, see if he had any more of the 'electric shingles'. That failing, and providing we could find his place of business, we could rummage through his records and see where he got the shingles. He might have used a local supplier or, perhaps a supplier in Denver.”

“That's a good idea Clarence,” Herb responded. “In the meantime, we'll bring up the

main generator and wind turbines full time and retire the portable generators. We can take the main generator down late at night, when the usage is lowest, for periodic maintenance.”

The men and women spent the remainder of the day sketching out a plan for their forthcoming scavenging trip. It was decided that they would take the empty gasoline tanker and see if they could refill it with diesel fuel. Derek made a list of plumbing supplies he needed and Clarence made a list of building supplies they should try and locate.

Don had the deputy manning the command trailer (why they still manned it, Don wasn't sure) try to reach the military using the Sheriff's radio frequency. The deputy said that he'd call Don if he managed to make contact. Don was itching to get back to Pueblo to see how his community had fared.

Wednesday, August 3rd, 8 am, Sheriff's mobile command center...

Don hastily sketched out their plan to Captain Baker. Baker told Don that he would have to bump the request to higher command. Don assured the Captain that the group had the ability to pay for anything they took and that if the owner could not be located, that he, as the Sheriff of Pueblo County, would appropriate the materials on behalf of the county. Captain Baker said he would pass it along. Baker left instructions that they should monitor this frequency every morning at this time; he would get back to them as soon as he could.

Wednesday, August 10th, 8 am, Sheriff's mobile command center...

“They have approved your request and have instructed me to provide an escort,” Major Baker advised the Sheriff. “We will meet you on the outskirts of Pueblo at 0600 on Friday morning.”

“Thanks Major,” Don acknowledged, “And, congratulations on your promotion.”

Friday, August 12th, 4:45 am, The Ark...

The convoy would consist of the tanker and both 5-ton trucks, the Thumper truck and 4 additional pickups. A sixth pickup, Mary's, would pull Herb's 30' trailer. The vehicles were arranged and, except for Mary's, were driven by deputy sheriffs all in their uniforms. Derek manned Thumper and the magazines were now loaded with the same mixture, flechette, buckshot, slug, flechette, buckshot, and slug... They departed just before 5:00 am and arrived on the outskirts of Pueblo right on time at 6 am.

The military escort consisted of two Hummer's, the first equipped with a Ma Deuce and the other with an Mk-19 grenade launcher. The tanker was sent to the fuel depot and Thumper was sent with it. The deputies were instructed to fill the tanker with diesel and fill the abandoned gasoline delivery truck, if it were still there, with gasoline and to return to *The Ark*. Sergeant Brown was in charge of the military detail and he got on the radio,

requesting another Ma Deuce equipped Hummer to meet the deputies at the fuel depot.

The convoy set out for Colorado Springs. When they arrived at Colorado Springs, it took them some time to locate the Roofing Contractor's place of business. Searching through his warehouse, they located enough of the 'electric shingles' to cover only 4 homes.

They rifled through his cumbersome filing system, eventually locating his supplier, a firm in Littleton on the south side of Denver. Don wrote out a document, in triplicate, stating, "By order of the Sheriff of Pueblo County, the following materials have been appropriated for the good of the citizens of Pueblo county: ..." and listed the materials now safely resting in one of the 5-ton trucks. He signed the document, left the original for the roofing contractor, handed a copy to Sergeant Brown and kept the second copy.

Sergeant Brown got back on the radio and reported in. He advised command that they must travel on to Littleton and requested that the Denver area units be made aware of their pending arrival.

They drove on to Littleton and located the supplier's warehouse. They found more materials than they could possibly use. Two of the pickups were also filled with the 'electric shingles'. Don wrote out a similar receipt, listing the items appropriated and distributed the documents as before. They filled the half-filled 5-ton truck and the second 5-ton truck. Adjacent to the warehouse was a plumbing supply warehouse and they loaded up several hot water heaters, gas orifices, sinks, piping, and more. Don, once again, left a receipt.

As they prepared to leave Littleton, they spied a retail store that sold ATV's. They inspected the store and found more than a dozen ATV's, all similar, still in their boxes. They quickly loaded the ATV's aboard the pickups. With their vehicles now fully laden, they set out to return to Pueblo. As they passed Fountain, Herb said, "Hey look over there fellas," pointing toward the town with lay on the east side of the road.

"I don't see nothing," Ron remarked. "What do you see, Herb?"

"Wind turbines..." Herb breathed, the joy in his voice apparent.

They continued to Pueblo, dropped off the military escort and returned to *The Ark*.

Friday, August 12th, late evening, main room, Central...

While Clarence made plans to re-shingle the homes with the 'electric shingles', Herb excitedly talked about the wind turbines he had spied. It was agreed that they would contact the military and, if permitted, disassemble the wind turbines and move them to *The Ark*.

Clarence, for his part, was calculating what it would take to mount a panel on top of each mobile home to hold the 'electric shingles'. The homes had about 1,000, perhaps

1,100 square feet of shingles. Could they, he wondered, mount an awning above each mobile home and install enough shingles and a solar heating system to supply each home with hot water and electricity?

Before he went to bed that night, Clarence had decided that they would need to construct free standing awnings, constructed of OSB or plywood. They could harvest a tree or two from the National Forest and saw out some posts if they couldn't find what they need in Pueblo. He looked at the list of building materials that they hadn't had time to seek out and added several items to the list.

Chapter Forty-three – The Cost of Survival

Monday, August 15th, 8 am, The Ark...

Jan had her baby the day before. She had presented her husband with a healthy 7# 5oz baby girl. The new mother and the baby were doing fine. Fred and Jan decided to name the baby Freedom.

Same date and time, Sheriff's mobile command center...

"I'll relay your message to the Major," Sergeant Brown replied. "We'll get back to you as soon as possible."

Clarence and his crew had begun to strip the shingles from the 10 homes. They could have simply shingled over the asphalt shingles, but Clarence preferred to do things 'right'. "We'll have this done before the end of the week," Clarence thought to himself, "I wonder how fast Don can get us permission to drive up to Pueblo?"

By the end of the day, 3 homes were re-shingled and Herb had made the electrical connections. Derek had worked all morning assembling several of the solar heating units, instructing several of the teenage boys and girls how to fabricate the solar panels. When he was satisfied that they knew what they were doing, he left them to their own devices. He figured to work one day behind Clarence and also figured that they should have all of the homes converted to solar heated water about the same time that Clarence finished up. To that end, they began modifying the plumbing inside each of the homes.

Friday, August 19th, 7 pm, main room, Central...

The 10 homes now sported electricity-generating roofs. The solar heating systems were in place. Holes had been dug at 8' intervals around each mobile home using the posthole digger. They built patio covers and laid the solar heating panels on the flat cover. All they needed were the building materials to continue.

Clarence had determined that they would need 18 2"x12"x24' rafters, 99 2"x6"x8' cross members and 54 sheets of 4'x8'x½" OSB per unit; in total 360 rafters, 1980 cross members and 1080 sheets of OSB. Plus he calculated 180 20' poles and 180 40' poles. "My," he thought, "That's a lot of lumber. It will take semi just to haul the OSB, maybe more."

Monday, August 22nd, Sheriff's mobile command center...

"The major says that you are free to pick up the lumber you need," Sergeant Brown said, "But we are still awaiting approval of your removal and reinstallation of the wind turbines."

Clarence and Herb had joined Don in the MCC. Clarence was elated, Herb was, to say the least, feeling quite dejected. Clarence tried to cheer Herb up.

“Herb, if we can get those patio covers up,” Clarence said, “We can wait a while for the turbines. It all depends on whether or not we can come up with that much lumber. We only need to take pickups; we will need to haul the lumber back here on semis.

About 9am, a convoy consisting of 6 pickups plus Thumper left for Pueblo. When they arrived in Pueblo, a deputy directed them to first one lumberyard and then another. They located a huge pile of old telephone poles at the phone company. But, they were short on OSB, plywood and some of the other lumber.

One of the deputies suggested that they check the rail yard before they drove up to Colorado Springs. When they got to the rail yard, 5 flatcars carrying lumber sat there waiting to be unloaded. Their luck was holding. Now, if they could just find enough tractor-trailer rigs to haul the lumber back to The Ark. The same deputy suggested that they should check warehouses and large retail stores. Perhaps they could locate some abandoned rigs.

Sensing that they had better take advantage of their luck, the men located several tractor-trailer rigs and began to load lumber. Unfortunately, there was more lumber than trucking. Clarence remembered the guy who had delivered ‘his entire stock’ to them back when. A quick trip to that lumberyard failed to produce any more trucks. Two deputies drove over to the Sheriff’s Department, fired up the backup generator and called the MCC on the radio.

“Sheriff, this is Don Adams,” the deputy said, “We have more lumber than trucks. Turn the trucks around and send them back, please.”

Don dispatched the semis back to Pueblo in pairs accompanied by a pair of pickups. It took them until late evening to deliver the last load of lumber to *The Ark*.

Tuesday, August 23rd, The Ark...

Using the old Ford tractor with the loader, the poles were set in place rapidly. By the end of the day, half the poles were in. Clarence had already begun framing the covers and laying OSB. Three covers were in place and installation of the shingles had begun on the first.

By Wednesday night, all of the poles were in and 3 more covers had been framed. Shingles were being installed on the next three homes. As soon as the roofing crews had moved high enough up the roof to allow the plumbers room to work, the solar heating panels were done. They wanted to set up spotlights and work through the nights. That was deemed too risky.

The following Monday morning August 29th, promptly at 8 am, the Sheriff contacted the

military only to be told that the matter was under consideration. Don was becoming frustrated and Herb, well it's difficult to put how Herb felt into words.

"Give them another week, Herb," Don consoled, "If they haven't said yes by then, maybe we'll just say screw them and I'll appropriate more private property for the good of the citizens of Pueblo County."

Half of the roofs were shingled. Everyone, Clarence especially, was certain that by Friday, or Saturday at the latest, the project would be complete. There had been no more attacks; perhaps the Army was getting that problem solved, too. The week passed quickly and by dusk on Friday night, the last home had been shingled and the solar heaters installed.

They held another barbeque on Saturday afternoon/evening to celebrate the completion of the awning job. At Don's suggestion, they even invited some of the military in the area to the party, especially Major Baker. The military had declined and they still had no word on the wind turbines.

Monday, September 5th, 9 am, MCC...

After an hour of trying, they were unable to raise the military. Herb was Po'd beyond belief. Don, on the other hand was uneasy.

"You know Herb," Don said, "This is awful strange. Our communications with the military have become so reliable, we can usually reach someone day or night. And, the LRRP is late in checking in. I'd suggest that you put the facility on Yellow Alert. I'd also suggest that we get Lloyd to fly that glider thing of his over the last reported position of the LRRP. Finally, I suggest that you get your LRRP group together and be prepared to move out. I'll have Derek pull the vehicle patrols in a bit closer to home."

After Herb had placed *The Ark* on Yellow alert, he hurriedly assembled his patrol. He had never seen Don so uneasy. Clarence was attaching spotlights to the outside ends of the patio covers. The trailers flanked the east and west sides of the compound. He called to Clarence and suggested that Clarence use the remaining poles and erect spotlight on the north and south ends of the compound.

"Got them," Damon announced. "Lloyd, you're right over the LRRP. Begin an orbit over their position."

Lloyd was controlling the sailplane from the cupola. Damon had rigged a second screen in the cupola quite a while back. Lloyd looked at the screen and was finally able to pick out the LRRP. "Nuts!" he thought, they are surrounded, "No wonder they haven't reported in." Lloyd decided to expand the orbit of the sailplane.

As he did, Don was joining Damon in the security office. Looking over Damon's shoulder, he suddenly said, "Oh my God, look at that."

Before him, on the screen were the bodies of several hundred soldiers, all apparently quite dead. Don grabbed a radio and said, "Herb, get to the security office on the double."

As the sailplane continued to orbit, it became apparent that about 300 – 400 men, fully armed with the soldiers' weapons were assembling and preparing to move out towards the east. "Now, that's what I've been talking about all of the time," Herb announced shaking his head. "I'll be right back," Don said.

Don hurried to the MCC, took a box from one of the cabinets and returned to the security office. He sat the box on the floor. "What would you say, Herb, if I suggested that we do an Alvin York?"

Herb looked mystified. "What are you getting at Don?" Herb and most every other American knew the story of Sgt. Alvin York who during WW I had captured 130 odd Germans. According to the movie, York had shot a group of German soldiers, starting at the rear and moving forward. Herb didn't know that Sgt. York's Diary described the event.

There were over thirty of them in continuous action, and all I could do was touch the Germans off just as fast as I could. I was sharpshooting. I don't think I missed a shot. It was no time to miss.

In order to sight me or to swing their machine guns on me, the Germans had to show their heads above the trench, and every time I saw a head I just touched it off. All the time I kept yelling at them to come down. I didn't want to kill any more than I had to. But it was they or I. And I was giving them the best I had.

Suddenly a German officer and five men jumped out of the trench and charged me with fixed bayonets. I changed to the old automatic and just touched them off too. I touched off the sixth man first, then the fifth, then the fourth, then the third and so on. I wanted them to keep coming.

I didn't want the rear ones to see me touching off the front ones. I was afraid they would drop down and pump a volley into me.

"Herb, what would happen if we could get Randy's LRRP and your LRRP behind those fellas?" Don asked.

"We could shoot some of them in the back," Herb replied, "Only Randy and I have silencers. If anyone else fired, they would hear us and attack us. I don't like the odds of 8 men against 400 men."

"Not necessarily, Herb," Don said reaching for the box. "What if you had these?"

Don opened the box. It contained 6 Surefire M4FA Suppressors. Herb reached into the

box and picked up one of the suppressors. He looked it over.

“Don, it looks to me like this suppressor has a special mount,” he said.

“You’re right Herb it does,” Don replied, “And Herb, all 6 of the M-16’s that the LRRP’s carry have been modified. The suppressor is fitted using a special adapter. The adapter replaces the standard ‘bird cage’ muzzle brake/flash hider. The suppressor fits over the brake and is secured to the adapter with a large locking nut. Get one of the LRRP M-16’s and I’ll demonstrate. Herb called to a member of his team who was standing in the main room.

“Give Don your rifle,” Herb said.

The deputy handed the rifle to Don who slipped the suppressor over the brake and turned the locking nut. Herb grabbed two of the suppressors and handed them to the deputy. He grabbed the other 3 and put them in his pack. He gathered his team and they took off.

Herb and his team swung a wide circle around the group of men. By the time they were behind them, the men had passed Randy’s LRRP by. They quickly joined Randy’s group and Herb attached the suppressors to all of the unsuppressed M-16’s.

He whispered to Randy what they were going to do and the men rose to catch up to the group of men. As soon as they had the men in sight, the 8 LRRP team members selected a target and took turns shooting the men. The suppressors were very quiet. You could still hear the supersonic noise of the bullets, but, they were far enough behind the men and well enough camouflaged that the men, had they looked, would not have been able to detect them.

And it continued in this fashion until the armed group came in sight of *The Ark*. The spot/flood lights were blazing. Herb grabbed his GMRS/FRS radio and announced, “They’re here...”

The attackers were no slouches. They fanned out encircling the compound, remaining low and just outside of the floodlit area. A few men started forward and met with no resistance. Encouraged by the lack of response, they moved forward in mass and the quiet of the night was suddenly ruptured by a mass of fire from within the compound.

Thumper was spewing out rounds as fast as anyone could ever remember, as Derek rotated the weapon in a continuous circle, pausing only to let someone remove the empty magazine and insert a fresh one. The LRRP’s with the M-16’s switched their weapons to full automatic and raked the attacking men. They quickly exhausted their ammunition.

The firefight continued for about twenty minutes. The defenders had suffered their first casualties. The battle was over. Robert, Paula’s husband was dead. The wife of a depu-

ty sheriff was dead. Two teenagers were dead, each the child of a deputy. Derek had a slight wound. Two deputies were wounded. The other wounded included Brenda, and several teenagers. None of the original founders of *The Ark* had a single scratch. Fred tended to the wounded. None of the wounds would prove fatal.

All of the attackers lay dead or dying. The 8 LRRP's quickly dispatched the surviving attackers with their handguns. Although the danger was past, they maintained the Red Alert throughout the night. The next morning, they collected the weapons and ammo, loaded the dead attackers aboard the 5-ton trucks, and hauled the bodies to the ditch. When all of the bodies had been removed, they poured diesel fuel and gasoline over them and burned the bodies.

Later, a large group of residents shovels in hand, arranged the bodies of the soldiers, which included Major Baker and Sergeant Brown, in a deep ditch and covered the bodies with dirt. The residents planted a staff with a US flag on the grave, mounted up on the military vehicles and drove to Pueblo where they turned and returned to *The Ark*.

Although *The Ark* had gained hundreds of weapons, several military vehicles including a couple of Hummer's with Ma Deuces mounted and one with the Mk-19, The residents of *The Ark* felt that they had lost more than they had gained. They had lost friends among the military. They had lost members of their group. They had lost the remainder of their innocence.

Chapter Forty-four – Fire

September 7th, 11:00 am, north of the compound...

The women of *The Ark* had washed and dressed their fallen comrades; Clarence and his assistants had built coffins; and Chris and Matt had fashioned crosses using square tubing. The folks carried the coffins to the graves that John had dug, lowered the coffins and held a service. When they had finished the eulogies, each person tossed a shovel of dirt into each grave, and then made his or her way back to the compound. A small group of men remained behind and finished filling the graves, set the crosses and then they too, returned to the compound. Except for the security details, little activity occurred for the remainder of the day.

Thursday, September 8, 2005, security office, 8 am...

“We need to make a trip to Pueblo,” Herb said.

“What for Herb?” Don inquired.

“We should,” Herb began, “Return the military vehicles to Pueblo, except of course for the 3 Hummer’s with the weapons mounted. While we’re in Pueblo, we should recover whatever extra ammunition and other military weapons we find and return them here. Someone is going to come looking for those soldiers, Don, so why don’t you Law Enforcement folks draft a report of the incident?”

“Already in the works,” Don commented.

“We need to get those wind turbines, too,” Herb insisted. “I think that this is our window of opportunity.”

The group of men visited for the entire morning, and by lunchtime had a plan.

Friday, September 9th, 7 am, The Ark...

Don and a deputy climbed into a squad car and led the convoy which consisted of all of the military vehicles except for one Ma Deuce equipped Hummer; one 5-ton truck; and, the semis. When they arrived in Pueblo, they parked the military vehicles at the High School, loaded what military supplies they could find at the makeshift command post onto the 5-ton truck and directed the driver and one guard to return to *The Ark*. They then located a truck-mounted crane and set out on I-25, north bound.

When they exited the interstate at Fountain, Don and the deputies headed for Ft. Carson and Herb and the others headed towards the wind turbines. When Herb and the others arrived at the turbines, they made short work of their task. They found one half-erected turbine. They removed the lower section from its mounting and laid it on a semi. They then inserted the upper half inside of the lower half and set the crates containing

the blades, generator and other parts on the same semi. They had the second turbine aboard a second semi when Don and the deputies arrived back from Ft. Carson.

They needed a break, so they paused for lunch and ate their MRE's while Don recounted the events at Ft. Carson. They had, he said, been taken to a one-star and had presented the box of dog tags and the incident report. The General questioned them at length and then thanked them for honoring the dead by taking the time to bury them.

They hadn't, Don reported, mentioned the weapons equipped Hummer's or the recovery of the military supplies from the Pueblo HQ. However, when they were ready to leave, a 6 by 6 was sitting next to their squad. The general told them that they'd find 3 additional Ma Deuces another Mk-19 and all the ammo he could spare for the weapons. They would also find a military base station radio, antenna and medical supplies on the truck. It was little enough thanks, according to the General, for what they'd done.

When Don had finished relating the events at Ft. Carson, the men returned to their task and were able to dismantle the 3 remaining turbines, and load them aboard the semis. Herb went to the control room and within an hour had recovered the computerized control system for the turbines. The real miracle, in Herb's opinion, was that the turbines were all AOC-15/50 units. They didn't arrive back at *The Ark* until nearly midnight.

Saturday, October 1, 2005, The Ark...

It had taken them 3 weeks to install the turbines. Strange how things come apart faster than they go together. The Sheriff had resumed limited patrols of His County; sending four deputies per squad to assess the condition of Pueblo County.

A dozen Hispanic families had presented themselves at the front gate of *The Ark* and were, after screening, made welcome at *The Ark*. A dozen abandoned 14'x70' mobile homes were recovered from Pueblo and towed to the compound. Clarence had erected awnings over the 12 new trailers and the new families were each given a new home.

John had completed the harvest and the sunflower seeds had been stored in some hastily erected Butler grain silos. They had constructed a still and were producing alcohol for the biodiesel project. The pregnant sows had had their litters and their herd had grown considerably. Several cows had calved and they were producing more milk than they could use. They had begun to produce cheese and butter from the excess milk.

Using information he had gathered from a website before the Internet went down, John, in his 'free' time, and some of the young people had constructed a methane production facility and they were producing enough methane to switch *The Ark* from LP to methane. A census was taken and the population of *The Ark* had grown to 284 people.

They had slaughtered a hog and one of the feeder cattle and had the meat slowly cooking in preparation for their end of season celebration. Some beer had been chilled and the original five men were seated at a picnic table visiting.

"This has," Ron said, "Grown beyond anything I ever imagined. Although it seems like a lifetime ago, do you fellas realize that *The Ark* was nothing more than a topic of discussion a year ago?"

"My, my, my," Clarence responded, "Is that all the longer it's been? I agree with you Ron, that was a lifetime ago."

"It's a darn good thing that we got out of the Antelope Valley when we did," Gary offered, "Most of the people who didn't die from SARS were killed off by the gangs from LA and the inmates who escaped from the prison in Lancaster. An electric fence doesn't do much good when the lights go out and the generators run out of fuel."

"How do you know that Gary?" Fred asked.

"Fred, there is, was," Gary explained, "A Ham group in Lancaster. I talked to one of the fellas just last week. At one time, the Antelope Valley was filled with paramilitary militias. When the housing boom of the late '80's and the '90's occurred, they became less vocal and removed themselves from the public eye. They resurfaced after the SARS pandemic and have established an enclave in Lancaster. The thing is, if we hadn't moved here, we might well have been taken out by SARS."

"Or, one of the other diseases," Fred added. "Or, by the gangs or cons."

John joined the men and brought up the subject of next year's crops. "Ya know fellas," John began, "There's probably enough Diesel up in Pueblo ta last us for 10 years; I suppose that we ought to plant some of those 300 acres in corn next year. We can harvest it as insulage and put it up in a silo.

"Our herds are growing and if we breed all of the heifers and female pigs, it will be huge in no time. We'll castrate the male pigs and calves and eat them. Maybe, we can even start selling meat to the Army."

Ron raised his bottle and said, "To absent friends."

"To absent friends," they echoed.

They sat at the table and visited. Don joined them and John asked him where they could find a farm with silos. Don said that he would check with the deputies and get back to him. The miniature festival lasted late into the evening. Ron made sure to limit himself to 2 bottles of beer. The addition of the Hispanic families was a blessing for the relocated Californians, they had come to miss the 'Mexican' food they had eaten a lot of back in California. Now, if they could just locate a Chinese family...

Monday, October 3, 2005, 9 am, MCC...

The military had reported that the lights should be back on in Pueblo within a month, give or take, depending upon line outages and other problems that might surface. Natural gas service had already been restored. This meant that the deputies and he could move their families back to Pueblo soon. As Don sat there contemplating the move, he heard...

"Car 2 to base."

"Go ahead car 2."

"Tell the Sheriff that we have a big problem here," the deputy replied.

"This is the Sheriff," Don said grabbing the microphone, "What kind of problem?"

"Sheriff," the deputy responded, "We have a fire. It apparently started near east 12th Street and north Ogden Avenue. It's spreading to the east in a fan shaped pattern."

"10-4," Don replied, "Monitor and report the fire's progress."

The deputies sat helplessly watching the fire spread. A 10 mph wind was blowing from the west fanning the flames and helping spread the fire. Eventually, the fire burned itself out, having consumed 30 or more blocks of homes. Don was standing in the cupola watching the distant smoke. When eventually the smoke subsided, he returned to the MCC and got on the radio.

"Car 2?" he said.

"Car 2," came the reply.

"Car 2, Romeo-Tango-Bravo," Don said. "And on the way back, stop by a fire station and pick up a fire truck."

The patrol car, followed by a fire truck arrived at *The Ark* about an hour later. In the interim, Don had found Derek and discussed modifying the outlet valve of the water tank to incorporate a fitting that they could attach a fire hose to.

When the fire truck came to a stop, Derek grabbed a section of the large canvas hose that was used to supply the truck with water from the hydrant. He tossed it into the back of Mary's Dodge and he and 3 deputies left immediately for Pueblo. The deputies directed Derek to the city water department maintenance facility and he located a fitting that would connect to the hose. He picked up pipe nipples another valve and the supplies he would need. They returned to *The Ark* and Derek set about installing the fitting to the tank.

The same day, 7 pm, the main room, Central...

“Just when I began to think that we could return to Pueblo, this had to happen,” Don lamented.

“Why can’t you return to Pueblo?” Clarence asked.

“Clarence, infrastructure takes years to build,” Don replied.

“The buildings and equipment are there, but not the trained people to operate the equipment.”

“Speaking of infrastructure,” Ron said, “I’ve been thinking. Don, have your deputies checked on the Mormon group of that housing sub division group?”

“Yes, they’re doing fine,” Don replied.

“Tomorrow, why don’t you have the deputies contact them and get their radio frequencies?” Ron suggested, “It’s time for us to meet our neighbors.”

Chapter Forty-five – New Friend

Tuesday, October 4th, 10:00 am, radio shack...

“Here you go sport,” Don said, handing Gary a piece of paper. “My deputies got the frequencies for you and they will be expecting to hear from you. They merged the two Pueblo groups into one larger group some time back.”

Gary set the frequency on his radio and keyed the mike. “KD6GDQ calling W0EYO. KD6GDQ calling W0EYO.”

“Go ahead KD6GDQ, this is W0EYO.” A voice came back.

Gary began a long exchange with the fellow on the other end. It seems that he was originally from Iowa, thus the Zero in his call sign. They chatted for about twenty minutes and agreed that a delegation from *The Ark* would travel to Pueblo soon. The other Ham had a Kenwood radio and an Icom. And, he had a beam antenna with all of the elements!

The contents of the truck of supplies provided by the General up at Ft. Carson proved to be surprising. There were 4, not 3, M-2 machine guns, the Mk-19 and case after case of .50 cal ammo loaded in a 4 ball to one tracer ratio. There were also 15 cases of the Mk-19 ammo. They replaced the Thumper mount in the cupola with a mount for the Mk-19 and semi-retired Thumper. An M-2 was installed in each of the 4 towers. Fred was grateful for the additional drugs and bandages.

Inspecting *The Ark*, Herb commented that they were loaded for bear. It was snowing lightly and through the course of the day, the snow began to accumulate. As the road began to drift shut, all patrols were recalled. It suddenly occurred to some of the residents that they should have gotten some snowmobiles.

Some of the women thoughtfully prepared vast pots of chili and dragged them to the main room. The folks filtered in, had a bowl of chili, or two, and drifted back to their homes. When the din had subsided, someone put *In Harm's Way* into a VCR and several of the residents settled in to watch Gary's favorite John Wayne movie. Someone fired up the popcorn machine they had liberated from a theatre in Pueblo and there they sat, eating Theatre popcorn, drinking sodas and watching a movie. The Good Life!

The snowstorm soon became a blizzard and it lasted for several days. It became necessary to lock down the wind turbines and fire up the generator. Herb worried about the dynamite charges that, during the big attack, had been completely overlooked and consequently, had all but been forgotten. He was pretty sure that freezing them wouldn't cause them to explode, but he wondered if they would still be good when spring came around.

Friday, 8:00 am, The Ark...

Gary was in the radio shack visiting with his fellow Ham operator up in Pueblo. The roads were pretty much impassible and with no State, County or Local maintenance crews to clear them, the meeting was postponed indefinitely. They exchanged some demographic information about the two communities, discussed only in general terms, their states of preparedness and such and signed off.

Gary was excited. The other fella had unintentionally left Gary with the impression that they were short of weapons. It wasn't something he'd said, it was more like a subtle evasion that had occurred during the course of the conversation. Gary found Ron and Clarence sitting in the security office drinking coffee.

"Ron," Gary said, "I just finished talking to Dan up in Pueblo. I have the impression that they are short of weapons up there."

"Hell," Ron said, "We've got weapons running out of our ears. What we don't have is anyway to get around in this snow. We really blew that one."

"Gary," Clarence intervened, "The next time that you talk to Dan, why don't you simply offer to trade him weapons and ammunition for snowmobiles?"

Saturday, October 8th, security office...

"I mentioned the attacks to Dan," Gary was telling Ron and Herb, "I told him we had quite a surplus of weapons and asked him if they would be interested in a trade."

"Do you really think that you should have put that information on the air?" Herb asked. "One of the things that has always bothered me about you folks is your openness."

"Anyway," Gary continued, ignoring Herb's question, "I told them that we needed snowmobiles. They will be riding down tomorrow and, if we can come to terms, will exchange us some snowmobiles for arms. Dan said that they would leave at first light."

Sunday, October 9th, around noon, The Ark...

"This is the front gate, those fellas are here on the snowmobiles," the guard reported.

"Send them on back," Herb instructed. "Towers, keep your heads up!"

Twenty-four snowmobiles made their way from the front gate to the compound. Herb immediately noticed that, aside from a couple of AR's, the men were armed with hunting rifles. A man walked forward, extending his hand.

"I'm Elder Jacob Brooks," the man said.

"And, I'm Ron Green," Ron said, taking the man's hand. "Come in and warm yourselves."

They went to the main room and tea was served.

“Now, Jacob,” Ron said, “Gary seems to think that we each have something the other needs. He says that you need arms and we need snowmobiles. What do you propose?”

“Since no one seems to have the other at an advantage here,” Jacob said, “What would you propose to offer us for one snowmobile?”

“Well,” Ron offered, “We have a surplus of M-16’s. I expect that we could offer one M-16 per snowmobile.”

“I understood from Dan,” Jacob said, “That you have accumulated A LOT of weapons. How about 3 M-16’s per snowmobile?”

“Two,” Ron offered, “And a half case of ammo per rifle.”

Ok, two rifles, a half case of ammo per rifle, and, a total of 4 riot guns, with 250 rounds of ammo per riot gun,” Jacob countered.

“Can we get 12 snowmobiles?” Ron asked.

“Of course,” Jacob smiled, “That’s why we brought 24.”

Herb left and sorted out 24, full-auto selective fire M-16’s, 7 magazines for each rifle, 12 cases of .223 ammo and four of the captured Mossberg 590 Riot guns. He also set out 5 cases of flechette and 2 cases of 00 buck. When he had finished, he summoned some of the residents and they carried the ammo and weapons down to the snowmobiles. They placed the weapons, magazines and ammo aboard the sleds and returned to the main room.

“Jacob, the rifles, shotguns and ammo are aboard the sleds,” Herb said. “The M-16’s are selective fire, full-auto. The shotguns are Mossberg 590’s. There are 12,000 rounds of .223 ball ammunition, 500 rounds of flechette and 500 rounds of 00 buck.”

“We had better get a move on,” Jacob said, “As it is, it will be dark by the time we get home.”

The men rose, donned their cold weather gear and left. Herb watched them distribute the rifles, one per man and the shotguns. The two fellows with the AR’s removed magazines from their packs and handed them out. They mounted the snowmobiles, 2 men per vehicle and departed. Derek and a group of the residents started up the 12 remaining snowmobiles and drove them over to the gasoline delivery truck where they were refueled. They would resume the patrols of *The Ark* tonight, using 6 of the snowmobiles.

After Jacob and the others left, the men were sitting around discussing their good fortune. Don remarked that the snowfall was unusually large for the area. John was beside

himself.

“We have to get hay out to those cattle,” John said. After the crops were harvested, John had turned the feeder cattle loose to graze.

Chris offered, “Matt and I can build some sleds sort of like Jacob was pulling, will that work?”

“Yeah,” John replied, “Then we can feed ‘em and try to herd ‘em back to the dry lot.”

“I’ll help, too,” Clarence offered.

Using plywood and 1”x4” lumber Clarence rapidly assembled 6 24”x 48” platforms with lips. Matt produced a bag of bungee cords and Chris rigged some short lengths of chain as tow bars.

“Not my best work,” Chris allowed.

“Mine either,” Clarence agreed, “But as hard as that snow has gotten, they’ll do until we can figure out something better.”

October 10, 2005, outside the compound, The Ark...

John directed that 2 of the old-fashioned rectangular (square) bales be placed on each of the sleds and that the bales be secured to the sleds with the bungee cords. He and five young people attached the makeshift sleds to the snowmobiles and set off to feed the cattle. The sleds worked after a fashion but tended to dig into soft snow. By the end of the day, they had made five trips delivering hay to the cattle.

Main room, shortly after 7:00 pm...

“I thank you fellas for the sleds,” John said speaking to Chris and Clarence, “The cattle are fed and tomorrow, we’ll herd them back to the dry lot.”

“Sorry that those sleds didn’t work out so well,” Clarence apologized.

“Don’t worry about it my friend,” John chuckled, “They got the job done.”

Dan had called Gary the previous evening to advise that their people had arrived home without incident. Did Gary know, he asked to whom the land on the other side of the road belonged? Gary told Dan that he did not, but he would talk to the Sheriff and let them know. Why, Gary asked, did they want to know?

Dan advised that they were looking for a new location because their present location wasn’t best suited to their needs. Gary had checked with Don and learned that the three sections opposite The Ark were owned by ‘some dang Chicago investment group’. He

got on the radio and passed the information along to Dan. After the radio conversation ended, Gary asked one of the teenagers to take over the radio shack and joined Clarence and the others in the main room. Don and Ron had joined the group, too.

Gary told the others about Dan's request.

"It would be good to have neighbors," Ron said.

Tuesday, October 11, outside the compound, The Ark...

They used all 12 snowmobiles and had the cattle in the dry lot by lunchtime. Thereafter, John used the hammer mill and spent the remainder of the afternoon grinding feed for the cattle and other livestock. After dinner the men were gathered, as usual, in the main room.

"Clarence, come spring, we're going to need to build a hog house," John announced.

"I don't see why," Don interrupted, "There's a perfectly good set of buildings on the section to the north, and we can move the livestock up there."

"But, that's not our property," Ron protested.

"We'll annex it," Don announced, "And the property to the south, too."

"Why the hell not," Ron thought, "We've helped ourselves to everything else we needed."

Wednesday morning, John and a couple of deputies set off on snowmobiles to check out the buildings on the property to the north. Upon their return, they reported that the buildings were in good shape. There was a large barn, a large hog house, a corncrib, a machine shed, and a windmill and well house; there was a large house that had a fuel oil furnace. And, the lights were on!

On Thursday morning, John and the two deputies headed south to check out that farm. They returned to report that outside of a machine shed and apparently working well, the property was empty.

Periodically, Don contacted the military at Ft. Carson. He had been handed off to a Lt. Col. who kept him apprised of the military's progress. Electrical service had been restored to most of Colorado, including Pueblo. The gangs of convicts were being rounded up and put back into prisons, manned now by the military. Even so, the Col had reported, it would be some time before things began to return to normal. There were calls, he said, for a 2nd Continental Congress.

Ron, Gary, Clarence, Don and 2 deputies drove their snowmobiles up to Pueblo on Friday morning. Indeed the lights were on. They met with Jacob and the people over at the

Mormon enclave. Come spring, the Mormons were moving their entire enclave to the 3 sections across from *The Ark*.

The Mormons had been busy in their own right. They had assembled a lot of farm equipment, a small herd of cattle, hogs, and a large herd of horses. They had hauled feed for the livestock from farms in the Pueblo area. However, the men from *The Ark* could see that they were really cramped on space. They shared a meal, and got on their snowmobiles to return to The Ark. On the way back, they stopped by a sporting goods store and borrowed a dozen toboggans.

The situation well in hand, the residents of The Ark enjoyed a peaceful existence and in no time, Christmas was only two weeks away.

Chapter Forty-six – Everyday Routine

The men were uncertain what to get their wives for Christmas. A deputy had taken a snowmobile to town and had plowed the road from Pueblo down to The Ark. They could travel to Pueblo and shop for the women, but had no idea what to get them.

“We should drive up there and clean out a couple of stores,” Ron suggested. “Our wives are still women and I’ve never know a woman who didn’t like a pretty dress or perfume and the like.”

“I don’t know Ron,” Clarence said, “I’d lean more to the practical.”

“Well hell,” Gary said, “We can do both. What’s say we...”

Gary outlined his plan. They would ‘harvest’ Pueblo, gathering as much clothing, kitchen accessories, winter clothing, cloth, sewing notions, patterns, sewing machines, etc. as they could find.

Saturday, December 17, 2005, 8:00 am, The Ark...

Unsure of what they would find, the men took both 5-ton trucks and one semi plus a Ma Deuce Hummer and the Mk-19 equipped Hummer. They drove to Pueblo and set about looking through the stores. They found several stores that sold women’s clothing and stripped them bare. They found a store that sold skis and ski clothing and stripped it. Similarly, they stripped out a sewing store, taking its complete inventory of patterns, thread, buttons, material and machines. They spent most of the day ‘harvesting’. They returned to The Ark and stored their gathered bounty in the machine shed.

Over the course of the next few days, the men made discreet, if you could call them that, inquiries, usually framed in terms of “if you could have anything that you wanted for Christmas, what would you want, dear?”

The women, well aware of the huge supply of goods recovered from Pueblo, let their imaginations be their guide. They made certain that the men knew their sizes, etc. The men thought they were being clever, the wives knew better. It was strange, a couple of the men thought, how we just happen to have this or that or the other thing the wife had requested. Jan had been slipping out to the machine shed and the women knew the inventory far better than their husbands. What the men didn’t know wouldn’t hurt them.

The wives had been busy, too. One of them had a recipe for fruitcake and by making substitutions had come up with a very tasty ‘fruit’ cake. Sharon was very happy about that because Gary would all but kill for a fruitcake. She had been busy too, making quilts for all of the new babies. The men had cut a Christmas tree from the forest and it was standing in the main room, decorated with stringed popcorn, chains made of paper loops and the like.

December 24, 2005, The Ark...

Christmas eve, a church service was held in the main room and everyone attended. After the service, the ladies quickly returned to their homes, gathered the food they had worked over all day and a dinner was held in the main room. The room had an upper limit of 300 persons and it was filled to overflowing. The menu consisted of beef, pork, chicken, venison, and a couple of legs of lamb. There were fresh tamales, mashed potatoes, sweet potatoes, dozens of salads, and several cakes. Gary had spied the fruit-cake and thought that he had died and gone to heaven. One of the men dressed up as Santa Claus and handed out bags of fruit and candy to the younger children. The exchange of gifts would take place the next day, Christmas, in the individual homes.

December 25, 2005, noon, main room...

The men were having their usual get together telling each other how successful they had been at surprising their wives. (Yeah, right, the ladies were superb actresses.) Clarence mentioned that they needed to go cut down trees the next day because their supply of firewood wasn't going to last them through the winter.

One of the men had received a new chainsaw for Christmas and was at a loss to explain where his wife had come up with that. In fact, several of the men had received new chainsaws for Christmas. Herb sat there stoically, and never once mentioned the trip that he and a group of the young people had made to Pueblo in early December, gathering the gifts the wives wanted to give to their husbands. There had not been a frivolous gift given to any of the men. They had received winter-clothing, hand tools, chainsaws and other things intended to improve their ability to take care of their families.

Gary had received a brand spanking new Mosley 96-S HF beam antenna (10, 12, 15, 17, 20, 30, 40 meters) a Cushman A627013S VHF/UHF beam antenna (70cm, 2, 6 meters) and an 89' HDX-SERIES Heavy-Duty Crank-up Tower manufactured by US Towers. He figured that he could mount his MFJ-1798 10-band on the mast above the beam antenna and could talk to the world. A 1,000' spool of RG-8 and a box of coaxial connectors were also included. There was even an extremely heavy duty rotor for the beams. Where in hell had they found all of that? (HRO Denver) Standoffs held 11 meter, business band and a D-130-J antenna.

December 26, 2005, in the woods west of The Ark...

The new chainsaw owners were only too happy to try out their new Christmas presents. Several trees were dropped, trimmed and cut into transportable lengths. John slapped a chain on them and dragged them back to *The Ark*. By the end of the day, they had dropped, trimmed and sized enough trees to keep John busy for days hauling them back to the compound. The next day the men planned to cut the trees into suitable lengths for the wood stoves and split the logs using the hydraulic log splitter. It took them to the end of the year to finish up all of the wood.

Saturday, January 1, 2006, main room...

Television service hadn't been restored so the men drug out some old VHS tapes of previous Super Bowls and watched football on the large screen TV. Gary positively hated football and he sat in the radio shack trying to raise new contacts. Come spring, he'd have his Christmas present up and be reaching out. Don had moved the military radio to the radio shack together with a police radio removed from a squad car. At least communications were now centralized. Gary gave up trying to reach anyone and played his umpteenth thousand game of Free Cell on his computer. He never seemed to get above an overall 66% winning rate.

February 1, 2006, The Ark...

Aside from the chores of feeding the livestock, milking, butchering, hauling firewood and the occasional hunting trip, life was becoming a little boring at *The Ark*. They hadn't been attacked again, couldn't build anything this time of year and the men were becoming restless. They checked with the military and got permission for a trip to Denver.

Thursday, February 2, 2006, 5 am, The Ark...

The morning was bitter cold. They filled their vehicles with diesel, warmed them up and set out in a convoy to Denver. They had called ahead and Jacob and a few fellas from the Mormon compound joined them for the trip north. The convoy included both 5-ton trucks and the 3 Hummers, the Mk-19 unit being placed in the center of the group of vehicles and the Ma Deuce vehicles leading and bringing up the rear. When they arrived at the southern outskirts of Denver, a sentry confirmed their identity and motioned them on. Obviously, the Lt. Col had notified the guard to expect the group.

It wasn't so much that they needed anything in particular; it was more that they needed to get out. They spied a grocery warehouse and decided to investigate the facility. They found some much needed vegetable oil, spices, a few cases of canned goods and a lot of toilet paper and soap. Good, they could ALWAYS use TP and soap. The appropriated items were loaded aboard one of the 5-ton trucks and they continued the outing.

Spotting a sporting goods store, they found it to be devoid of anything worth taking. They foraged most of the day, but little was to be found. Gary got lucky; the HRO store in Denver had the base for his tilt up tower and it and 6 more standoffs were quickly loaded on a pickup. They turned and drove back to Littleton and picked up additional plumbing supplies at the plumbing wholesalers and headed south. They handed the guard the military's copy of the appropriation forms and motored on to Pueblo. They stopped in Pueblo, divided the recovered goods among themselves and the Mormon community and returned to *The Ark*.

Friday, February 3rd...

They drove an empty diesel tanker to Pueblo, and refilled it. They had stopped by the

Mormon compound and unloaded the tanker, returned to the yard, refilled it and returned to *The Ark*.

Every two weeks or so, they ventured to Pueblo, met with their new friends and worked on plans to assist the Mormon's upcoming move. Each trip, they returned pulling empty 14'x70' mobile homes and lined them up along the edge of the road leading to the entrance of *The Ark*.

Monday, April 17, 2006, moving day...

The snow was mostly melted, there were still patches, but the time had come for the Mormon group to move to the country. The day before, Jacob and a couple of the others had come down and shown John and others where to spot the mobile homes. While John and a crew busied themselves hauling the homes into place on the property, the other residents drove the semis and 5-ton trucks to Pueblo. The move had been carefully pre planned and busy hands quickly loaded the trucks and semis to capacity. Jacob had located several tilt bed straight trucks and the farm machinery was already loaded.

By late morning, they were ready to make their first trip to the new farm. By shortly after noon, all of the trucks had been unloaded and after a quick lunch, they returned to Pueblo. They returned late in the day and unloaded once more. Herb had picked up a couple of transformers on one of the trips to Pueblo and had power lines strung to the new farm. They worked through the night and by morning, had temporary electricity to each of the mobile homes. The residents would have to wait for their methane pit to be up and operating before they had gas for the homes. The residents of *The Ark* insisted that the Mormon's take one of their two 5,000-gallon LP tanks. The Mormon's reciprocated by giving the residents of *The Ark* a dozen of the horses, just as soon as the animals were brought from Pueblo.

They returned to Pueblo, loaded the hogs aboard one of the tilt bed trucks, which had been outfitted with slat siding constructed by the Mormon's. They saddled up the horses and drove the cattle to the new farm. By the time the load of hogs had reached the farm, a barbed wire/pig wire corral had been erected. The cattle and riders didn't arrive for 3 days. The cattle, it seemed, weren't in a hurry.

Using the old Ford NAA and backhoe, the new farmer's dug a trench and installed sewer, water and underground electrical lines. At Herb's instance, the pipe for the underground electrical lines was extended to *The Ark* and the lines on the Mormon side were connected to a heavy-duty transfer switch. If the electricity went out again, the backup generator would kick in and supply their new neighbor's with power.

Jacob's group had someone with experience in producing biodiesel and he agreed to convert the stored sunflower seeds to biodiesel for *The Ark*. At least, they could provide fuel for the generator. Despite all of their plans, the residents of *The Ark* had never gotten around to converting the sunflower seeds to biodiesel. In the first place, they lacked the skills; in the second place, diesel fuel was plentiful in Pueblo.

John had run the fence lines on the farm to the north, making repairs as needed and the feeder cattle were let loose on the farm. The hogs were transferred to the hog house using the tilt bed truck. The dairy cattle were kept on the dry lot. After he had also checked and repaired the fences on the farm to the south, the sheep and goats were set free on the farm there. The two groups shared equipment and the crops were in, in relatively speaking, short order. The Mormon's had planted an entire section in corn, another in wheat and the central section of the three sections in a variety of crops. John had planted the 300 acres of corn, as he had planned.

Clarence had become fairly proficient at slip form construction. They 'recovered' three ready mix trucks from Pueblo as well as a portable plant. The plant was setup on *The Ark* property and truckload after truckload of sand, aggregate and cement was hauled in to feed it. Using metal forms and jacks that had found at a contractor's warehouse, they began to erect a 20' diameter concrete silo. A few of the men from across the road were experienced in concrete silo construction and with their guidance an 80' concrete silo was erected for the insulage. The forms were moved across the road and their neighbors erected 3 20'x80' silos.

One day, they had a barn-raising event, and a new barn appeared. The Mormon's were in place and ready to go much faster than *The Ark* people had ever thought they would be. Of course, there were over 500 people between the two groups. So many people, in fact that they had to take turns working on the barn for fear of getting in each other's way.

A trip to Ft. Carson got the new group a donation from the US Army. Grateful for an unsolicited truckload of fresh meat, the General had somehow misplaced 4 Ma Deuces, an Mk-19 and a sizable pile of .50 cal ammo, .223 cal ammo and 40mm belted grenades. Everyone had a smile on his or her face that day. The General also said that President Cheney had officially called for a 2nd Continental Congress. When he had more news on the subject, he would advise them. He presented Dan with a military base station and antenna for his radio shack.

Dan had dismantled and moved his radio tower. Gary, with quite a bit of help from Damon, Derek and Clarence, had gotten his erected. Now that they were within shouting distance of each other, Gary and Dan could darn near burn out the other fellow's rig if the beam antennas were pointed straight at each other. By common agreement, the groups decided on CB channel 20, as their common communications frequency.

Several of the younger women were expecting. It had, indeed, been a cold winter.

Chapter Forty-seven – Compound II

With the crops in, the first order of business was to secure the Mormon's compound. They accomplished this by building a two-foot thick concrete wall around the housing area, which included the windmill and well. The residents of *The Ark* took note and decided to build a similar wall to ring their entire compound. The trailers had previously been outside of the compound and this addition would improve security for the residents of the trailers.

Someone, perhaps several someone's, suggested that they hadn't fought their last battle. Someone else suggested a tunnel and well, you know how it goes, by the time the discussion was ended, it was decided to build a tunnel connecting one compound to the other.

After much discussion, it was decided to make a run up to Pueblo and see how much material was available. Much to their disappointment, they were unable to find any significant amount of culvert. Someone suggested that the solution to the problem could be found by 'thinking outside the box'. A light bulb went off in Clarence's head. He quickly outlined his idea to the fellas and they immediately agreed.

John was instructed to move his tractor up to the road and dig towards *The Ark*. He was to dig a trench about 4½' to 5' wide and 7' deep. Jacob and his people jumped into two of the tilt bed trucks and headed back to Pueblo. They located and brought back two city tractors with backhoes.

One tractor began digging just inside the fence line toward the compound of trailers. The other began to dig a trench across the road in-line with and level with the trench John was digging. Clarence assembled a crew and slapped together forms to form an inner and outer box. When properly aligned, standing on end, the space between the boxes formed square cylinder 10' long, 6" thick and with interior dimensions of 5'6" high by 3'6" wide and exterior dimensions of 6'6" high by 4'6" wide. By the end of the day, the trench was across the road, the Mormon's trench stretched halfway from the road to their compound and two backhoes were digging different sections of the trench on *The Ark* property.

The next morning, Jacob and a couple of men drove to Pueblo, located a concrete pump and had returned by 8:00 am. Clarence and his crews had quickly built 4 more of the box structures and they mixed up a load of ready mix and filled the forms. After concrete was allowed to dry overnight, the forms removed and they now had 5 10' sections of tunnel. The forms were reassembled and refilled. Clarence built 5 more of the forms and filled them too. They could now construct 100' foot of tunnel per day. Meanwhile the backhoe had finished digging the trench on the Mormon's side of the road and they now had 3 backhoes digging on *The Ark* property.

It took 2 months of steady, hard work, but, by the 3rd of July, the tunnel was complete, overlain with a layer of dirt and seeded. It was a good thing that they hadn't returned the

crane to Pueblo after they had erected the wind turbines.

July 4, 2006, early afternoon, The Ark...

The side of beef had been cooking for several hours over a pit fire. The smell of the meat slowly roasting had whetted everyone's appetite. As the year before, they had a huge amount of food. This was the 230th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence. They were drinking Gary's home brewed beer and visiting. Most of the folks from the other side of the road were drinking lemonade. Ron didn't know whether it was because they didn't drink or what. Frankly, he didn't care as long as no one gave him a hard time about enjoying a beer.

Jacob, a fella named Bob from the other farm, Dan and Gary were visiting about the possibility of 2nd Continental Congress. Gary was proposing that the 2nd Amendment should be rewritten to state simply, "The right to keep and bears arms is an individual right of all citizens and shall not be infringed." Gary had several other opinions about Constitutional Law, the only subject from his days in law school that he completely understood.

He even had a proposal for what he called a model criminal justice system. Upon conviction of a first offense for any felony, a person was to be imprisoned for a period not to exceed 10 years. If the person could clearly demonstrate that he/she had been rehabilitated, they would be released and remain on parole for the remainder of the 10 year sentence.

Upon conviction of a second offense for any felony, the person would be sentenced to a ten year mandatory sentence, not subject to parole in addition to the same sentence as a first offense. Upon conviction of a third offense for any felony, the person would be taken out behind the courthouse and shot. That raised a few eyebrows.

They had also visited at some length how peaceful it had become over the past few months. The LRRP's were maintained during the warm weather months and there were now 4 LRRP's, two from each side of the road. The vehicular patrols were also maintained, but had expanded their AO.

The food was finally ready and everyone had eaten his or her fill. Between the two communities, they had 10 expectant mothers. They had even secured some fireworks from somewhere and the kids were happily setting off firecrackers. As the day turned into evening, a runner from *The Ark's* radio room handed a note to Herb, who sat at a table eating with Ron and Jacob and their wives.

"It would seem that we need to break this party up quickly," Herb announced. "We just received a message from the military that they observed a large group of heavily armed men south of Colorado Springs headed this way."

The party quickly broke up and each group returned to their respective compounds. It should be noted, at this point, that the residents of *The Ark* had armed everyone over the age of 14 and up with an M-16A2 3 round burst rifle and 13 30 round magazines.

The remainder of the surplus firearms had been given to Jacob's group. Jacob's group had also built towers inside the 4 corners of their compound and mounted the Ma Deuces.

The Army had supplied both groups with large quantities of the new NSD-A land mines together with several cases of M-18A1 APM Claymores. All of the mines had been installed and could be command armed and detonated individually or in blocks from the Mk-19 cupolas or from the radio shacks.

Herb called the military at Ft. Carson by radio and was told that the military was pursuing the group but hadn't been able to catch up to them. At last report, the group was on state highway 78 and headed right for the group. All patrols were recalled and they hunkered down for the wait.

They thought that they heard vehicles in the distance, but were unable to see anything. Lloyd got the sailplane airborne and headed up Highway 78. He orbited the sailplane above the attackers and the two compounds communicated with each other using the encrypted military bases stations. The attackers encircled both compounds and began fire on the compounds from the dark. The floodlights were turned on to blind the snipers. Systematically, the snipers shot out the floodlights. Rockets, probably AT-4's, struck the watchtowers and cupolas of both compounds, destroying them. The towers, now reinforced with 1" plating, were unable to withstand the blows from the AT-4's.

"Oh Crap!" Herb exclaimed. He rushed to the radio shack and instructed Gary to arm the mines by radio. The NSD-A mines can be armed using a hard wire connection or by radio.

Around 3 am, the attackers began to attack the compounds in earnest; but, when the first mine detonated they withdrew. A short time later, the mines began to explode in large numbers. Observing the scene through night vision binoculars, Herb could see that the attackers had retrieved some of the 40' telephone poles from the storage area by the machine shed, and were using the poles as makeshift devices to clear the mines. "Dang," Herb thought, "These guys must be professional soldiers."

Jacob's people began to detonate their Claymores. Normally an effective weapon, the attackers were just outside the effective range of the weapon. When it became apparent that the Mormon compound was about to be overrun, the wives and children were sent to *The Ark* using the newly finished tunnel. The Mormon men held out for a little while longer, and then abandoned their compound, carefully closing the concealed entrance to the tunnel. Their compound was briefly ransacked while the residents of the Mormon compound, hereafter compound 2, made their way to *The Ark*, hereafter compound 1.

There were now over 500 people assembled in compound 1. No one had received a serious wound, and Fred began to patch up those with minor wounds. The compound 2 attackers joined the compound 1 attackers and began laying down a hail of fire. The defenders were forced to keep their heads down.

The volume of fire seemed to suddenly increase, but the compound stopped receiving hits. The Calvary had finally arrived! Trapped between the attacking troops from Ft. Carson and compound 1, the attackers eventually succumbed to the crossfire.

Just after dawn, Gary received an all clear on the military radio; he disarmed the NSD-A mines with a radio command and the defenders joined the troops who began to clean up the bodies. Herb had been right; the attackers were soldiers in BDU's with helmets, web gear, and the whole nine yards. When the cleanup was finished, the Lt. Col asked that the folks assemble outside; the General wanted to address them.

"Ladies and Gentlemen," the General began, "I am Brigadier General Milton Robinson, the Commander at Ft. Carson. You folks were extremely lucky today. The group that attacked you was made up of deserters. They were well trained, well-armed and apparently had planned this attack carefully.

"I understand that you folks have a substantial quantity of Gold and Silver. Perhaps that is what motivated the attack, I have no idea. Please accept my condolences for your loss of life. My troopers have stripped the night vision gear from the bodies and the M-203's from their rifles. We will leave this equipment for you folks to use. We will send replacement weapons for those you lost."

General Robinson paused. "President Cheney has called for a 2nd Continental Congress to assemble in Philadelphia on September 1, 2006. The military has been assigned the task of identifying citizens from each state to represent that state at the Congress. After careful consideration, I have decided that the state of Colorado would best be served if each of your groups selected one representative for that Congress. Of all the groups in this state, you people seemed to be the..."

General Robinson explained his reasons for selecting these two groups to represent Colorado. He was then given a tour of the two facilities. The Lt. Col and the General were 'simply amazed' at the fortifications the two compounds had erected. When shown the tunnel connecting the two compounds, the General simply stared in disbelief. The compounds, he said, were better fortifications than most military installations.

Late on the afternoon of July 5th, 3 six by's loaded with replacement ammunition stores, 8 replacement M-2 machine guns the entire remaining stock of NSD-A mines, several crates of M-18A1 APM mines, and a substantial amount of fresh medical supplies arrived at the compounds. The residents showed their gratitude by loading several head of grown feeder cattle and grown hogs onto the trucks. After they had buried their dead, the compounds spent several days rebuilding their fortifications.

Errors in their construction were addressed, especially the lack of foresight in not providing gun slits. In their haste to erect the walls, the residents had overlooked the obvious and had been forced to look over the top of the walls to fire their weapons.

Each compound held a caucus, the outcomes nearly a foregone conclusion. Jacob would represent compound 2; Gary would represent compound 1. The two men met several times and found that they had little disagreement in their philosophies. Dan notified the General of their selection and was told to have the two men report to Ft. Carson on August 25th.

When they rebuilt the towers, Clarence and Chris teamed up. The towers would be built entirely of steel; they would be larger and they would have a canopy supported solely by a center post. Unable to form the heavy $\frac{3}{4}$ " plate into circular sections, Chris chose, instead, to fashion 3'x3' plates. Two layers of plates were used. A trip to Pueblo yielded a large quantity of the 'bulletproof' material, retrieved from two banks. The windows were installed, hinged at the bottom. In a firefight, they could be pushed forward and would add another layer of protection to the towers. The guns were mounted on a runner arrangement and could traverse the entire perimeter of the tower.

Another trip to Denver yielded Dan and Gary a single 1,000' coil of RG-213U from HRO. While they were at it, they completely emptied the store, taking repair parts, radios, antennas, an assortment of other coaxial cables, repair manuals, and everything but the counters. Looking at the loaded truck, they realized that the Denver HRO didn't have a lot of stock. "Just like the one in LA," Gary thought. The men returned to *The Ark* and upgraded their communications installations.

At a combined meeting of the residents of both groups held on Sunday, July 30, 2006, the two compounds were renamed *The Ark 1* and *The Ark 2* with the greater community now being referred to simply as *The Ark*. Recalling a discussion from their early planning stage, Ron suggested that they plant a natural fence (see Chapter Seventeen) around the entire 6 square miles. "I don't know where we will come up with enough plants," Ron said, "But we can at least start."

Clarence quickly reminded Ron of their earlier conversation, if 4 miles of natural fence were impossible, surely, he reasoned, 10 miles of natural fence, even if they could get the plants, was even more impossible. Remembering the earlier conversation and the information he'd gleaned from the Frugal Squirrel website, Ron relented.

Monday, August 14, 2006, Ark 1...

Ron, Gary and Clarence were sitting in the security office visiting about the forthcoming Congress. A young lady who had been manning the radio shack handed Gary a message.

"What's that Gary?" Clarence asked.

“General Robinson wants to see you, me, Ron, Chris, Fred and Derek,” Gary read from the message, “At Ft. Carson at 0800 tomorrow morning.”

“Oh crap!” Ron exclaimed.

The men departed for Ft. Carson at 6 am. They arrived early and were left to cool their heels in the General’s waiting room until precisely 0800.

Lt. Colonel Jamison, opened the door to the General’s office and said, “Gentlemen, the General will see you now.” They rose, entered the General’s office and stood before his desk.”

“Gentlemen, you may be seated,” General Robinson directed, “Sgt. Olsen, you will remain at attention!”

Derek snapped to attention and stared straight ahead.

“It has come to my attention, Sgt. Olsen,” General Robinson said, “That you were just beginning a one week leave when the balloon went up. Please account for your time since that day. I have all of the time in the world.”

“Sir,” Derek began. For the next hour or more, he recounted in precise detail the events that began with his arrival at the Des Moines airport.

“At ease Sgt. Olsen,” General Robinson said when Derek was finished, “You may be seated.”

The General then quizzed the men at length, confirming Derek’s story. The last to speak, Ron, said to the General, “General, I was never in the military so I don’t know exactly how you folks do things. I can tell you that this young man had upheld the highest ideals of the military. He risked his life several times to save our butts!”

General Robinson conferred briefly with Lt. Col. Jamison. Lt. Col. Jamison nodded his head, snapped to attention and left the room. The General sat, apparently in deep thought. Lt. Col. Jamison returned and handed the General a small box.

“Gentlemen,” the General began, “I have no desire to punish Sgt. Olsen, especially in light of what you have told me. Sgt. Olsen, Please come to attention.”

Derek rose and braced.

The General continued, “I have been given wide latitude in these matters. Sgt. Olsen, if given the opportunity to serve your country and sweep your rather irregular departure from our ranks beneath the rug, would you do so?”

“Yes sir!” Derek replied, hoping against hope that he wouldn’t have to leave Mary, Eliz-

abeth and Joshua.

“Then, by virtue of the authority specifically granted to me to dispose of this incident,” General Robinson stated, “Sgt. Olsen you are hereby promoted to the rank of Captain in the United States Army. This is a full commission, not a reserve commission.”

“Sir, yes sir!” Derek replied, saluting the General.

“You are appointed to be the military liaison between *The Ark* and this post,” General Robinson said. “Your duties, unfortunately, will require that you live at *The Ark* and report to this post on a weekly, or more frequent basis, understood?”

“Colonel Jamison, will you set to it that CAPTAIN Olsen, is properly outfitted as befits an officer in this man’s army?”

“Sir,” the Lt. Col. replied, “Come with me Captain.”

“Meanwhile gentlemen,” General Robinson continued, after Derek and Lt. Col. Jamison had left the room, “I’d like to talk to you about supplying this post with fresh meat...”

The men discussed the topic of supplying meat to the Fort on a regular basis. Their herds were too small to provide the amounts the General wanted, but they agreed to supply as much as they could. Since currency was worthless, it didn’t even make good TP, the military would pay for the meat using a combination of armaments and gold. Just as they were finishing up their discussions, Derek and the Col. returned. Derek sported a fresh haircut, and wore new BDU’s with the soft black insignia of his new rank on the lapels.

“Captain Olsen, Col. Jamison will instruct you further,” General Robinson said dismissing the men.

The men returned to *The Ark*, much relieved, in fact joyous, at the outcome of the day’s events.

Chapter Forty-eight – Derek’s Luck

Wednesday, August 16, 2006, main room...

“Derek,” Don said, “Er...excuse me, Captain we have room in the MCC for you to set up an office, if you wish.”

“Thank you Sheriff,” Derek replied, “And, it’s still Derek. I’d like that. We’ll install the second military base unit in the MCC and I’ll operate from there. However, for the life of me, I don’t know how my being back on active duty is going to change anything.”

“Time will tell, Derek,” Don replied, “Time will tell.”

Derek left to find Damon and to get Damon to install the new base station. Clarence, Gary and Ron were sitting at the ‘bar’ in the main room drinking coffee.

“You sure must be proud of Derek,” Clarence bubbled, his usual happy self.

“I am that,” Gary conceded. “I was certain that they would arrest him and court martial him for not heeding the President’s recall.”

“Partner,” Ron spoke, “These are strange times indeed. Who would have thought, two years ago when this was but an idea I had yet to put forward, that things would turn out the way they did?”

“Who would have thought that I would have any input to a rewrite of the Constitution?” Gary responded.

“What do you intend to do?” Ron asked.

“The problem with the 1st amendment is that it fails to protect the privacy of the individual,” Gary replied. “The problem with the 2nd amendment is that it’s too vague. There may be other problems, but those are the two that stick in my craw.”

“Do you have solutions to those problems?” Clarence asked.

“Not for the 1st amendment, but I do for the 2nd amendment,” Gary replied. “The right to keep and bear arms being an individual right shall not be limited or restricted by the Congress or the states.”

“Sounds like something to generate income for lawyers,” Ron laughed.

“What do you mean Ron?” Gary asked.

“What use is an absolute right if you don’t prohibit them from regulating firearms?” Ron countered.

“Most federal laws are based on the commerce clause,” Ron said, “The National Firearms Act of 1934 was to regulate the interstate commerce of certain weapons and devices. All I can say partner is that you have your work cut out for you.

“I wonder if anyone has any ideas.” Gary lamented.

“I sure wish that the Internet were up. I’ll bet the squirrels would know what you should do.” Ron chuckled.

Linda, Sharon, Lucy, Patti, Jan and Freedom joined the men. They were pleased to report, thank you very much, that the output of the garden was triple that of the previous year and they still had more to harvest. They were short of canning jars; could the men make a trip up to Pueblo and find more? And, especially, they needed more lids.

The men groaned, grumbled (and cussed), and soon found themselves on the road to Pueblo. They spent the remainder of the day searching for quart jars and canning lids. They had brought a couple of pickup loads of armed teenagers and the teenagers went from home to home searching basements, garages, and cupboards looking for jars and lids while the men searched every store and warehouse in town.

Their efforts bore fruit; it was a good thing that they had brought one of the 5-ton trucks to haul their bounty. They had several hundred jars and probably every canning lid remaining in Pueblo. They hadn’t searched all of the homes, so perhaps there were more jars out there, but they only found a few cases of canning lids and had to come up with an alternative for the future. Of course, they could go up to Colorado Springs and conduct the same type of search, but they were uncertain how long the lids were good for until the rubber dried out.

August 17th, on the road to Colorado Springs...

The ladies committee must have had the same idea as the men. Here the men were on the road to Colorado Springs looking for more canning lids. Oh, and jelly jars, too.

“It’s just not worth the fight,” Ron had announced when he explained the trip to the other men. “Besides, who knows what we might find in the stores and warehouses in Colorado Springs?”

They had both of the 5-ton trucks, the 30’ trailer and a semi plus two of the tilt bed trucks. It was a large convoy that headed out to Colorado Springs that August morning. It proved to be one of their more successful trips. They found 2 Snow-cats. They found more snowmobiles, more ATV’s, a truckload of parts for the trucks and tractors, case after case of motor oil, crankcase oil, filters, canning lids (lots of canning lids), quart jars, jelly jars, several 21 cubic foot deep freezers, radios, clothing, the list went on and on. They filled the trucks and vowed to return the next day with their entire fleet of semis.

And, return they did, by the time they had stripped Colorado Springs, Don had writer's cramp from writing the Appropriation receipts. They returned to *The Ark* fully laden and exhausted.

August 18th, The Ark 1, 8:00 am...

The residents of *The Ark 2* joined the residents of *The Ark 1* and they equally divided the items recovered from Colorado Springs. When he spied the fuel tanks stacked on two of the semis, Bob was jubilant. There were six 5,000 above ground tanks for diesel fuel and two 5,000-gallon LP tanks.

There was no describing Bob's joy when he discovered a new, disassembled 30,000-gallon galvanized water tank. After replacing the 5,000 gallon LP tank that *The Ark 1* residents had supplied them, Bob drove the semi over to *The Ark 2* and began unloading the tanks.

The Ark 1 decided to erect another pole building to house the freezers, meat cutting operation and supplies. Clarence was still working on the building when Gary left for Ft. Carson on the morning of the 25th. They had poured a concrete floor and erected the building. They were in the process of insulating it to provide for year-around use.

August 25, 2006...

Gary and Jacob, together with an escort, made their way to Ft. Carson. They spent some time with General Robinson and were eventually transported to Denver International where they boarded an executive jet to be flown to Philadelphia.

Meanwhile, back at The Ark...

Clarence and his crew finished insulating the building and began to set the equipment that Bob and others had recovered from two grocery stores in Pueblo. They had several stainless steel tables, two meat-cutting band saws, grinders, tenderizers, and of course the freezers.

"I wish that we had some drywall to cover the insulation," Clarence complained.

"How about we use plywood?" someone suggested. "Lord knows that we have plenty of 1/4" plywood paneling."

"Well, why not?" Clarence asked rhetorically. They covered the equipment with drop cloths and spent the next two days paneling the walls and ceilings with plywood paneling. Some of the men from *The Ark 2* were meat cutters by trade and they would staff the facility.

The herds of cattle were growing, about half of the calves were bulls and they became meat. The heifers were kept for breeding. The same principle was applied to the other

livestock and all of the herds were growing. In a couple of years, if all went well, they would be supplying the military with the kinds and amounts of meat it required. As it was, they would need to build another hog house, they had plenty of pork.

Paula, Ron's daughter, was dating Mark, the deputy who had lost his wife in the third attack. Damon was dating the adult daughter of another of the deputies. DJ had to settle for running around on an ATV, there were no tractor-pulling contests here.

Udell hadn't had a drink since the last time that Clarence and Fred talked to him and he and Amy seemed to be getting along better. Ron's brother Don was laid up; his back had given out on him. Fred suspected spinal compression and shot discs, but lacked the equipment or skills to provide Don any long-term relief. Don was up to 120mg of Oxycodone a day, about $\frac{3}{4}$ the maximum dosage. As a whole, the residents were very healthy; it seemed that the extra exercise did wonders for them.

They decided to have the final barbeque of the season on what would have been Labor Day, the first Monday in September. Given their surplus of pork, they decided to try and roast whole hogs, Hawaiian Luau style. Another couple of hogs would be barbequed on the large grills liberated from Colorado Springs. The ladies committee, which now included the ladies from Ark 2, began to plan and coordinate the side dishes. The butchers sorted the meat and had a freezer full of steaks and hamburgers. Sorry, they said, but we haven't conquered the hot dog yet, but, they could prepare some thin sausages.

An invitation was extended to the military at Ft. Carson. Yes, of course, they told the General, they could feed 500 troops. They hurried to slaughter more hogs and cattle. Bob and a few fellows drove into Pueblo and liberated the ovens and bake ware from the same grocery stores. (It was a good thing that Clarence had foreseen this and built an extra-large building.) The butchers found that, by regrinding the sausage meat several times, they could approach the texture of a hot dog.

Sunday September 3rd was spend baking hamburger and hot dog buns, loaves of French bread, slaughtering hogs, setting out steaks to thaw, etc. Herb was thinking of the 4th of July events and had increased security to a high level. Gary had called on the military radio to report that they were slowly making progress on revising the Constitution. It seemed that half the group was lawyers; they couldn't agree on anything. The only hope seemed to lay with the fact that the lawyers were all conservatives.

Monday, September 4, 2006, Labor Day (old calendar), The Ark...

A large military convoy arrived around 1300. They did not come empty handed; they unloaded several kegs of beer, and full Colonel Jamison and Major General Robinson joined the folks to visit.

"I hope that you don't mind our bringing the beer," General Robinson said, "It wouldn't be Labor Day for the troops unless they could let their hair down a little."

Several baseball games were started, the troops against the residents.

“General Robinson?” Ron asked, “Have you heard any more from Philadelphia? We had a radio message from Gary, but he said all of the lawyers were causing problems.”

“Not much Ron,” the General replied, “Consider if you will the fact that while these people have a framework in the form of the present Constitution to work with, They have to consider 230 years’ worth of changes to our society.”

“General,” Ron persisted, “What do you think of those 230 years of changes to our society?”

“Ron, I long for the 1950’s before everything went to hell,” the General replied candidly. “There was a time in this country when if you didn’t work you didn’t eat. There were abuses; to be sure, segregation in the south may not have been one of our finer moments, for example. But, if you wanted a rifle or shotgun and were of legal age and had the money, you bought the weapon. Don’t get me started on the news media, or the so-called sexual revolution or ask my opinion of gays! Back in 2004 the city of San Francisco actually began issuing marriage license to gays! Can you believe that?”

“Well,” Ron thought, “At least we know where he stands on that issue.”

By evening, it was time for the troops to return to Ft. Carson. They had just enough food and wouldn’t have to worry about leftovers. No security issues came up that day. They cleaned up the area and some of the people gathered in the main room.

“What’s the movie tonight?” someone asked.

“*Top Gun!*” another replied.

“Again?” came the retort.

Chapter Forty-nine – Off to Congress

Tuesday, September 5, 2006, The Ark 1, main room...

Ron and Clarence were sitting drinking their morning coffee.

"I sure hope Gary gets home soon," Ron said, "I miss his sorry butt."

"They've only been at it less than a week Ron," Clarence replied, "I don't expect to see him back here before spring. I'm not much of a student of history, but as I recall, the Revolutionary War didn't end until November of 1782. The Constitution wasn't started until around 1787 and ratification wasn't announced until July of 1788. The point is it's going to take time Ron, lots of time. 'Sides, there are some real hot potato issues to resolve."

"I suppose," Ron reluctantly agreed.

John walked in, poured a cup of coffee and sat down.

"Morning fellas," John greeted them.

"Good morning John," Clarence smiled.

"Morning," Ron added.

"Say John," Clarence began, "When are we going to get some fruit from those apple trees?"

John laughed, "It will be a couple of years or more Clarence, they've only been in 2 years."

Shoot," Clarence responded, "I sure do miss fresh fruit. And, the ladies keep all the berry's they pick to make jam and jelly."

"I was thinking," John replied, "Maybe we oughta make that natural fence outta raspberry bushes and the like."

"Not on your life pal," Ron laughed, "I would like it much better if the bears stayed in the woods. We've already had to kill a bear each year to protect the people gathering berries. But, if you want to plant a large berry patch on the south farm, it would make sense to me."

"Ok, I'll check it out," John said, "But, we would have to move the livestock to the north farm. Maybe even plant a real orchard on the south place. We should be able to plant apples, apricots, grapes, peaches, pears, plums, and several varieties of berry bushes. I'll tell ya what Clarence; we may get a few apples next year. I'll save the first one we

pick for ya.”

“I’ll be looking forward to that John,” Clarence smiled, “I surely will.”

“How soon you going to be picking corn?” Ron asked.

“Already put up the insulage,” John replied. “Put some in the new silo for the dairy cattle and some on the north place’s silo for the feeder cattle. Be a bit before I can pick the remaining corn. Alfalfa is put up in the barn on the north place and we stacked some here. Oats and wheat are harvested. Ya know fellas, I think that we ought to move the dairy cattle to the north place. There’s a good barn and even some milking equipment. I’m sure as hell getting tired of milking by hand.”

“John, you’re in charge of the agriculture,” Ron said, “Tell us what you need and we’ll make it happen.”

“Yah, I know,” John replied, “Just wanted to run it by ya before I did it. Sure glad about those folks across the road; I hate shearing sheep,” John laughed.

In some ways, the residents had regressed even further than 100 years. Now, they sheared their own sheep, carded the wool and used old-fashioned spinning wheels to produce yarn. Sharon crocheted and several of the women could knit. No doubt a lot of people would be receiving gifts this Christmas of products that had been generated from start to finish right here at *The Ark*. It would be a long time before industry was rebuilt. It was a lot of work, but hard work never hurt anyone. And, it seemed to restore the sense of values and appreciation for material things when you couldn’t run to the mall and buy it.

“Those folks moving in across the road has been a true blessing,” Clarence said. “Only thing I’m wondering is just where in the hell we are we going to get any more lemonade?” he laughed.

Ron laughed too, “I offered one of those fellas a beer yesterday and received a polite lecture, or maybe explanation, on what they could and couldn’t consume. They don’t consume alcohol or anything with caffeine as near as I can understand. Good thing for us too, I have no idea where we are going to get more coffee when our supply runs out.”

“Denver?” Clarence and John asked together.

“Say, maybe we ought to make a trip to Denver before it snows heavily and closes the roads.” Ron suggested.

Ron got Derek to check with Colonel Jamison about a possible trip to Denver for the next day. Permission was immediately granted.

Wednesday, September 6, 2006, on the road to Denver...

The men brought every truck both groups had. They offered to find anything special their neighbors needed, in fact had invited Bob and some of the others along. Bob suggested that it might be a better division of labor if *The Ark 1* made the trip and *The Ark 2* folks lent a hand back home. Bob prepared a list of some things that they wanted and then laughed and told Ron to just scour the city; they'd sort it out later. Bob did, however, send 2 men along to go to a Stake Center to attempt to locate some special items for their group.

They arrived in Denver just after 7 am. A phone book was located and a search of the yellow pages disclosed the location of the grocery wholesalers in the area. They retrieved 4 pallets of coffee, 5 pallets of tea, several cases of baking powder, baking soda, and spices; and almost a semi load of TP and disposable diapers. A half semi load of fruit juices of every description were found and loaded. Denver had been pretty well picked over and they spent an uneasy night before continuing their salvage operation.

They found more vehicle parts, oil, filters and the like on the second day. Checking out a ravaged gun shop, they found an overlooked engraved Colt Peacemaker and a hand tooled western rig. The rig was just Gary's size and he had always wanted a Peacemaker, so Ron set it aside to give to Sharon for Gary. They even found several boxes of .45 Colt caliber ammo.

Checking a baking company, they found sugar, flour, spices, and vegetable oil. A second warehouse yielded more TP and diapers, paper towels, feminine supplies, candy, cake mixes, bottled water, shortening, and soft drinks including a lot of caffeine free labels. The Costco stores yielded paper and ink cartridges for Gary's printers; new mechanics' grease rags, and a bounty of over the counter medicines. One Costco even had a few cases of cigarettes. The fellows Bob had sent along must have been successful; they had several boxes in the back of their pickup.

Satisfied with their efforts, they pointed the trucks south and headed for home, arriving after dark. They set a guard around the trucks, just in case, had dinner and went to bed. Ron presented Sharon with the Colt and western rig; she said Gary was going to love Christmas this year.

Friday, September 8th, outside The Ark 1 compound...

The recovered items were divided between *The Ark 2 and 1*; Ron made a point of giving all of the caffeine free sodas to Bob, he hated the stuff anyway. The fruit juices were evenly divided, as were all of the other goods. In their absence, John had moved the dairy herd, sheep and goats to the north farm. Linda informed Ron that next year, they would have an outdoor herb garden; this year, the plants would be grown in a small area of the Food Building.

Ron and Clarence decided to go deer hunting the next day. Ron would use his Remington 700 and Clarence had to borrow a hunting rifle from Herb. They spent an hour prac-

ting to make sure they could still shoot.

Saturday, September 9th...

Ron and Clarence made their way into the National Forest. They found what they deemed to be a likely place and sat down to wait for the deer to come to them. About the time they were getting ready to toss in the towel and have a smoke, Clarence pointed to a large animal grazing below them. Ron took careful aim from the sitting position and dropped the large 'deer' with a single shot. They walked over and looked at the kill.

"Holy Mackerel, that's the biggest deer I ever saw," Ron exclaimed. Clarence snickered.

"There's no way we can haul this critter back to *The Ark*," Ron insisted and got on the radio to request help. The cut the animal's throat and gutted it. A short time later, a deputy showed up driving an ATV and pulling a large cart.

"Would you look at the size of that deer," Ron exclaimed, puffing his chest slightly. The deputy gave him a strange look, and snickered. They skinned the animal, quartered the carcass and loaded it aboard the cart. The deputy slowly trailed behind them as they walked back to *The Ark 1*.

When they arrived, they took the carcass to the Food Building. They went inside and asked the butchers to help them unload the animal. Ron was really in the bragging mood now, extolling the virtues of his one shot kill of the biggest deer anyone had ever killed. Hmm, were the butchers snickering?

Ron and Clarence headed back to the main room, got a cup of coffee and Ron elaborated on his skills as a hunter. The men present snickered.

"Now dang it," Ron shouted, "That's enough! What the hell is everyone snickering about? First Clarence, then the deputy, then the butchers and now you! Just what in the hell is so cotton picking funny?"

"You mean you really don't know?" Clarence asked, barely able to contain his laughter.

"If I knew, would I ask?" Ron retorted, his anger apparent.

"Well, you damn old fool," Clarence began, "That wasn't a deer it was an Elk."

"Oh," Ron meekly replied turning several shades of red.

"I thought those were awfully big antlers for a deer," Ron thought.

December 2, 2006, The Ark...

Jacob and Gary arrived from Ft. Carson around 3 pm. Gary looked like he had aged 10

years. He wearily dropped his suitcases at home, visited with Sharon for about 45 minutes and made his way to the main room.

“Gary!” Clarence fairly shouted, “It’s GOOD to see you.”

“Howdy partner,” Ron said giving Gary a hug.

“Sit down, I’ll get you some coffee,” Clarence offered.

Gary lowered himself into a chair, his fatigue evident. He sat numbly in the chair waiting for the coffee. Clarence returned with the coffee and Gary took a sip.

“So, what’s new?” Gary asked.

Clarence immediately told the tale of the great hunting trip and Ron’s huge ‘deer’.

“Aw for cripes sakes,” Ron protested, “I’m never going to live that down. How did it go in Philadelphia?”

Gary sighed. “You get two lawyers in a room and you have an argument. You get 50 lawyers in a room and you get nothing done.”

“Do you mean you didn’t get anything accomplished?” Clarence asked.

“No, not at all, they worked on the language of the Constitution, incorporating the language of the amendments into the document. We finally agreed on the language of the old second amendment. The right is now recognized as an individual right and Congress shall make no law, which would in any way restrict that right. Neither shall Congress make any law, which would interfere with the legitimate manufacture and sale of firearms or ammunition. The real sticking point has been the wording of the first amendment.”

“Oh?” Clarence said. “Do tell.”

“We have a lot of free speech advocates,” Gary continued, “Myself included. It is really tricky balancing the publics’ right to know against the publics’ right to privacy. We haven’t yet been able to agree on language for that issue.”

“You realize that before the advent of TV and TV journalism, the news was somewhat less sensational,” Ron commented.

“True,” Gary replied. “The old tests were that speech could not be prohibited unless it presented a clear and present danger and there was a balancing test set forth by the Supreme Court. Obviously, one can’t yell ‘fire’ in a theatre absent a fire that poses a clear and present danger. Nor can one publish secret military documents to aid and comfort the enemy; that is an even clearer example of a clear and present danger. But

where is the balance between the right to know and the right to privacy?”

“How do you think it will work out?” Ron asked.

“Danged if I know,” Gary admitted.

December 25, 2006, Gary and Sharon’s residence...

“I can’t believe it!” Gary exclaimed as he opened the carefully wrapped package.

“Where in the devil did you come up with an engraved Colt Peacemaker?”

“Ask Ron,” Sharon replied.

“What I have for you pales in comparison,” Gary said, handing a large package to his wife.

“Where did you find this?” Sharon shrieked. “Is it a genuine Amish quilt?”

“There are a lot of Amish folks in Pennsylvania, dear,” Gary replied.

Chapter Fifty – Back to Congress

Gary and Jacob were scheduled to return to Philadelphia on January 15, 2007. Despite the cold weather, Gary was dying to try out his new revolver. So, on the morning of January 2nd, Ron and Gary headed to the range. Ron set up a B-3 target at 50'. Gary carefully aimed and put 6 in the black. He holstered the gun and said, "It shoots straight!"

They returned to the main room for coffee. They began discussing security as a matter affecting the whole country.

"You know," Ron said, "Now that we are all carrying guns, there don't seem to be many violent crimes."

"Violent crimes," Gary retorted, "Are the product of decaying society. With the SARS thing, we lost a lot of the sources of the violent crime. All we have to deal with now are criminals from the time before the balloon went up. As near as I can tell, the Army has a good handle on it. However, I occasionally heard reports of a roving band or two of American terrorists."

"Apparently, these folks are all cons with a military background. The worst of the worst depending upon how you look at it. They swept through the south, passing up communities like ours and hitting the smaller groups. They hit National Guard Armories and are well equipped. They moved west, and then up the coast. Last reports had them in Billings, Montana."

Herb joined Ron and Gary midway through Gary's explanation.

"Do you think they will be a problem for us?" Herb asked.

"I doubt it," Gary replied. "Like I was saying, they seem to pass up large, well-organized groups."

"Does the military know about them?" Herb continued his questions.

"Yes," Gary replied, "General Robinson is aware of them. He thinks that they will skirt Colorado altogether."

"Still," Herb replied, "Maybe we should establish some forward observation posts."

"Up to you Herb," Ron responded.

After consulting his maps and talking with Randy, Herb met with his counterpart at *The Ark 2*. They decided to use the Snow cats and maintain a continuous patrol in a 5-mile radius from *The Ark*. They would run one vehicle day and night. They didn't expect any trouble, but better safe than sorry. Lloyd suggested that since they were patrolling with

noisy Snow cats it might be a good idea for him to follow the Snow Cat from the air with the sailplane, loitering about a mile or two behind the vehicle. The patrols commenced the afternoon of January 2nd.

January 5, 2007, The Ark...

Jacob and Gary left early in the morning for Ft. Carson. As in the past, they stopped and visited with General Robinson. Colonel Jamison caught them just before they were about to leave for the airport. Intelligence, he told them, now placed the group of marauders in Casper, WY. They expected the group to pick up I-80 and head east. When they did, the Army planned to pursue them and catch them in a pincer in mid Nebraska.

Reassured that the Army had matters well in hand, Gary and Jacob left for the airport. Later that day, Col. Jamison dispatched a squad of infantry and a clerk to *The Ark*. The clerk was to be permanently assigned to assist Derek. The infantry squad was under the temporary command of a 25-year veteran Sgt. Major who had instructions to review *The Ark's* defenses and recommend changes to Captain Olsen.

Since Randy was on patrol in the Snow Cat with his LRRP unit, Herb was asked to accompany the Sgt. Major and brief him on the defenses. When the Sgt. Major questioned the lack of a fence outside of the minefields, Herb explained how they intended to plant a natural fence.

"That's all fine and dandy Mr. Johnson," Sgt. Major Higgs spat, "But as I recollect the reports of your last battle, there was nothing to slow those fellas down. First thing I'd do is to plant mines beyond the area of your floodlights. Second thing I'd do is to erect some sort of temporary barrier, to slow them down between the two mine fields.

"Since it's too cold to erect a fence, why don't you create an ice rink? Make it, say, about 30' wide. If they can't get footing, it'll slow them down good. And, come spring, you won't have to remove nothing. Third thing I'd do is to reinforce those light brackets and use some of that leftover bulletproof material to cover the lights. Two layers ought to be enough. While you're at it if you have plenty of lights, install a second set. If you're attacked, let them shoot out the first, unprotected set. Then when they're in the open, turn on the second set and give 'em hell."

"And, how are we supposed to accomplish all of this Sgt. Higgs?" Herb asked. "We've used all of our mines?"

"Civilians!" Higgs snorted. "Now Mr. Navy man, tell me, did the Navy use 3 trucks to transport 14 men? I brought you a whole load of them fancy remote controlled mines. You'll have to arm them by radio, can't plant any wires this time of year."

"Guess it's a good thing I wasn't a Marine," Herb thought.

Higgs then left to fill the Captain in on the current intelligence. "This boy wasn't even a

90-day wonder,” he thought, “More of a 90-second wonder.”

After briefing Derek, the Sgt. Major mounted up his squad and pointed them north. Derek joined Herb who smiled and ask, “Did the crusty old bastard chew you up and spit you out?”

“No,” Derek replied, “But he sure looked like he wanted to.”

“How did you manage that?” Herb asked.

“You remember that bottle of JD I’d been saving for a special occasion?” Derek chuckled, “I took one look at him, decided that this was a special occasion and handed him the bottle with my left hand while returning his salute with my right hand.”

Herb got a crew and they hooked a line to the water tank firehouse outlet. By dark, they had a skating rink flooded. He gave Bob a heads up and they followed suit at *The Ark 2*. One truckload of the mines was given to *The Ark 2* and they planted them outside the skating rink, as did Herb at *The Ark 1*.

January 6, 2007, The Ark 1, early morning...

Try as they might, Herb and his crew couldn’t rig heavy enough supports to support the floodlights with the bulletproof ‘glass’ mounted on them. The next best thing was to mount a sheet of the material in front of the lights, attached to the top of the wall with a piece of angle iron. They had the second fixtures installed in a day and wired on a separate circuit a day later.

Derek received a radio report updating him on the marauders. They were in Cheyenne and had lain over for the night. They were expected to depart the next day on I-80 heading east. If anything unexpected happened, he would be notified. Herb was standing in Derek’s office listening to the report.

“You know Derek,” he said, “Maybe we ought to boost our security level from green to yellow, just until those fellas head east.”

When they had adopted the Green-Yellow-Red system, the Security Committee had required that every person aged 14 and up be fully combat outfitted during a Yellow Alert. That meant that the Ladies, if they weren’t armed, had to don the shoulder holsters and it meant that everyone else was wearing their web gear and carrying loaded weapons. Condition Green permitted the Ladies (reference here is to the middle aged wives) to go unarmed, if they chose, and only required 1 in four of the other residents to be armed. This usually entailed everyone with a handgun to carry the handgun.

January 8th, The Ark, Derek’s office, 10:45 am...

Derek received an urgent radio call from Ft. Carson. Instead of turning east, as ex-

pected, the marauders had continued south and were now in the city of Ft. Collins north of Denver. Derek notified Herb, who recalled the Snow Cat patrol and directed Lloyd to maintain a lookout north on Highway 78.

General Robinson thought long and hard about the situation. Much of his 7th Infantry Division and Fort Carson's Mountain Post Team were on assignment in Nebraska waiting for the marauders. Some were deployed forward of the advance, others on the flank. He had anticipated heading north with the remaining troops to join with the flanking units and complete the pincer movement. It had been a risk he was willing to take. Now, it seemed, it had backfired.

"Well, if I can't hit them like I planned," he thought, "I'll do the next best thing."

General Robinson recalled the troops from Denver and told them to join up with his 500 or so remaining soldiers. They would become flankers themselves, withdrawing and laying low until the marauders had passed. They would immediately pursue them, only this time, he hoped, they would arrive at *The Ark*, where the group was no doubt headed, before they were able to attack. Sgt. Major Higgs had plugged the holes in those folk's defenses, if they had followed his lead. A radio call was sent to *The Ark* and they were advised of the situation. He was gratified and relieved to learn that all of the recommendations had been implemented.

It had been snowing lightly for over an hour when Robinson advised that the marauders were in Pueblo, *The Ark* went on Red Alert. The General and his troops were just far enough behind the marauders to avoid detection. It was agreed, via radio, that the General's troops would get in place and hold fire until *The Ark* compounds were attacked in earnest. Lloyd reported he had the Bravo-Golf's in sight. The first string of lights, the unprotected group, was turned on. The residents made ready to don their night vision equipment. When the lights went out, they were prepared, this time.

"Bravo-Golf's deploying," Lloyd announced, "*All to Ark 1.*"

Herb requested that Bob send half his force to *The Ark 1* via the tunnel to reinforce *The Ark 1*.

"Darn good thing it's snowing," Herb remarked to no one in particular.

Ron, who had overheard the remark, asked, "Why's that Herb?"

"That damned ice rink barrier wouldn't be of much use if they could see it, now would it?" Herb retorted grimly.

Ron shut up. Just as the marauders began to shoot out the lights, Robinson reported that his troops were in place. When the lights had all been shot out, the marauders moved forward, right into the first minefield. When they were well into the minefield, both

minefields were armed. Several mines went off. The advance halted, and then resumed while the marauders carefully picked their way through the first minefield.

They marked the mines as they went and were soon approaching the ice rink barrier. As they entered the ice rink, the defenders removed their NV gear and the lights were turned on. They tried to turn and flee, only to be mowed down like so much wheat, taking rifle fire, machine gun fire and grenade fire from both the residents and the General's troops.

"By God, that's showing them," Herb shouted as the last attacker fell. The residents of *The Ark*, due to the several improvements since the last attack, received not a single injury. The General's troops fared nearly as well due to their winter cammo, which successfully hid the troops. Two minor injuries had been inflicted to the troops.

"I love it when a plan comes together," General Robinson thought, "Even if it's a half assed last minute plan."

The soldiers stripped the bodies, brought up the attacker's truck and loaded the bodies. All of the equipment was also loaded and was to be distributed to other encampments. When the troops had finished, they joined the residents of *The Ark 1*. They warmed themselves with hot coffee and other beverages.

Meanwhile, General Robinson, Captain Olsen and several of the men gathered in the security office. "I'm sorry men," Robinson stated, "We had an informant in their camp and thought we knew what they had planned."

"Probably caught him and tortured him to learn the truth," Herb offered.

"That would explain it," General Robinson said, "I hadn't even had time to think about where our intelligence had gone wrong."

"Hey, don't sweat it General," Ron offered, "Probably worked out better this way anyway. At least there were no casualties due to friendly fire."

"If you folks need anything," General Robinson looked right at Derek, "Have Major Olsen contact me." He departed, with his men, leaving an awestruck group of resident's with their mouths hanging open.

"Forget it kid," Herb finally composed himself, "You ain't no Major!"

"But," Derek protested.

"You can't be a Major," Herb continued, "You haven't even worn the shine off those Captain's bars." Laughing so hard tears streamed down his face.

Chapter Fifty-one – A New Constitution

Spring came early in the year 2007. The fields were too wet to work, so John made a trip to Pueblo and Colorado Springs. He was looking for plants for an orchard. He found many trees in nurseries. The trees, which were at the nurseries ready for sale, were all dead, but he located the nursery's growing plots. He couldn't get the Spade Truck to start so he returned to The Ark.

"Chris," John said, "Got a problem. Found a lot of fruit trees in Pueblo and up at Colorado Springs, but I couldn't get the Spade Truck to start."

The next day, April 2nd, a convoy that included all of the semis and a lot of labor, left for Colorado Springs. Chris tinkered with the motor for over an hour, replaced the battery, refilled the nearly flat tires, drained and refilled the gas tank and cranked it up. The motor finally caught. Chris let the engine idle and refilled the hydraulic fluids for the spade. John then began to experiment with the controls and in a short time had mastered the machine. Meanwhile, the people brought along to help, located twine and rolls of the gunnysack material used to ball plants.

A few of the folks took time to clean out the building where they would camp out until they were done. It took several days of effort, but they sent all five semis to *The Ark* twice with loads. They then moved to Pueblo and spent another week digging and balling those trees. John found tray after tray of bedded strawberries to add to their meager little strawberry patch. Maybe they could eat FRESH strawberries this year, maybe not.

The folks from *The Ark 2* had done most of John's fieldwork for him, opting to let him pursue the nursery project. What are neighbor's for if not to help? The trees went in a little faster than they came out; John had become very proficient at operating the Spade Truck. By late April, the orchards were planted, the strawberry beds in and a huge area of fruit bearing bushes planted. They took the time to erect a cyclone fence around the berry patch.

One of the tractors broke down. Chris could repair it, once they located the parts. The Mormon folks, didn't bat an eye, they took off on the tilt bed trucks and went on a foraging expedition of their own, returning with several tractors, plows, discs, drags and lots of wagons. They sent Chris to work on the self-propelled combine they found and he soon had it running. And, he'd located a sleeve kit, rings, pistons, crankshaft bearings and gaskets and was hard at work rebuilding the engine of the broken down tractor.

By the end of May, all of the crops were in. A group of several men gathered and castrated the calves and pigs. The herds were getting large enough to allow them to modify the contract with the Army and supply more of the needs of Ft. Carson. They had found another bull and another boar and had transported them to the north farm. That would, they thought, strengthen their breeding program. At the rate they were going, they might need to find another section of land for the cattle in a year or two. Given a few years, their herd would number in the hundreds, then in the thousands. Not bad, not bad at all.

And chickens, man, did they have chickens.

The men at *The Ark 2* had established a tanning operation and had accumulated leather, pigskin and furs. They had traveled to Pueblo and recovered a shoemaker's sewing machine and could produce leather goods of all kinds.

Back during their first winter at The Ark, Gary taught his limited trapping skills to anyone who was interested. They had accumulated quite a few Victor #1½ long spring traps, and some #2 double long spring traps. They even had a few Oneida # 3's and some larger. There were also quite a few # 1½ and # 2 coil spring traps plus Conibear sizes 110, 220 and 330.

Gary hadn't cared much for the coil spring traps or the Conibear traps, but he had been taught how to use them and passed on the knowledge. He had learned to trap creeks and fence rows in Iowa during the late 1960's and early 1970's. His former father-in-law was an excellent trapper and even trapped beaver. Gary gone with him a few times to run the beaver trap lines, but had never done it himself. Gary had fond memories of the time when his father-in-law had caught a badger. Funniest story he ever heard. He could just see the man trying to club a badger to death with his walking stick. The man carried a .22 revolver, but never shot the trapped animals.

June 1, 2007, The Ark 1, main room...

"Gary called on the radio," Ron said.

"How IS he?" Clarence asked.

"He will be home next week," Ron replied, "The rewrite is done and has gone out to the states to be ratified."

"How's that going to work, Ron, we don't have any state legislatures?" Clarence asked.

"Each enclave will send one representative to their state capital," Ron explained. "They will serve as a substitute legislature and vote to ratify or not. The Army will see that copies of the proposed revised Constitution are provided to each enclave in order that the people of that enclave can vote on the document. They will then select a representative who will be obligated to vote the majority opinion of their respective enclave."

"Won't that be cumbersome?" Clarence inquired.

"Maybe, but it will ensure that everyone has a voice in the adoption," Ron assured. "Gary said that they expect about ¾ of the US population will vote to ratify."

"How did they solve that 1st amendment problem?" Clarence wanted to know.

Ron laughed, "It seems that instead of Libel, Slander and Invasion of Privacy being so

called Torts, they made them crimes, felonies, I think. Bet that will keep the news media, if it ever resurfaces, from the yellow journalism that has plagued this country for so long.”

“And the final version of the 2nd amendment?” Clarence raised his eyebrows.

“Pretty much as Gary had suggested,” Ron smiled, “Except that they made depriving any citizen of his or her right to keep and bear arms a crime, too. Oh, and criminals automatically lose their citizenship rights when convicted of a crime for the duration of their sentence plus 10 years.”

“That means...” Clarence started.

“That a person can reacquire their citizenship rights if they clean up their life and act like a decent honest citizen should,” Ron completed Clarence’s sentence. “Of course, they have to wait a bit to make sure they remain rehabilitated.”

“Ron,” Clarence said, “Not to change the subject, BUT, do you suppose that we could make a run up to Pueblo before the Fourth of July?”

“Sure, partner, what for?” Ron smiled.

“Well...” Clarence hesitated, “They said we were going to have some fresh strawberries to eat and I was thinking that they be better if they were served over homemade ice cream!”

“Hell,” Ron laughed, “We’ll get every freezer in Pueblo and Colorado Springs and everyone can have homemade ice cream. I saw some of those electric freezers in both cities, but just left them set.”

“We gonna invite the Army again this year?” Clarence asked hopefully.

“Of course,” Ron replied.

Major Olsen was visiting with Sgt. Walker. Walker had been promoted to Sgt. when Derek got the gold leaf.

Derek's office in the MCC...

“Major, I had a call from Sgt. Major Higgs,” the Sgt. said.

“Oh, what did Sgt. Major ‘Crusty’ want?” Derek asked.

“It’s hard to say, Major,” Walker replied, “If I was to guess, I’d say he was fishing around trying to find out if they’re going to be invited for the July 4th festivities.”

"I'll check with Ron," Derek replied, "But, there's no hurry in answering him, let the old fart wonder a bit."

In truth, Derek had come to like Sgt. Major 'Crusty'. He wished that he could get him down to *The Ark* for a week and get him to let his hair down a bit. He was sure that there was a lot he could learn from a lifer like the Sgt. Major.

Wednesday, June 6, 2007, The Ark...

Jacob and Gary arrived at *The Ark* just after lunch. Ron was so happy to see Gary he hugged him (again). Gary spent some time with Sharon, then strapped on his Colt and looked for Ron. He found him in his usual haunt, the security room.

"What's in the boxes, partner?" Ron asked.

"One good turn deserves another," Gary smiled, handing one of the 5 boxes to Ron and a second to Clarence.

Ron opened the box and his eyes got wide. "Where in the hell did you..." he began to ask.

"Gary, this is great," Clarence said cheerfully.

"I managed to locate 3 Winchester .45 Colt caliber Legacy Model 94's," Gary beamed, "So I bought one for each of us. They're brand new too."

"Er, what's in the other boxes?" Clarence asked.

"Here you go fellas," Gary said, handing them each a second box.

Ron opened the box, which obviously held a handgun. He almost dropped the box.

"Sorry that I couldn't find an engraved Peacemaker, but I figured you wouldn't mind." Gary half apologized. "You can get Jacob's men to make you up holsters and belts."

"Wow," was all the two men could manage.

The three men immediately departed to sight in their rifles and get some revolver practice. They leisurely burned through several boxes of ammo.

"Whoa partner," Ron said, "We'd better not burn through all our ammo."

"No biggie, Ron," Gary smiled, "I ran into a fella who was trying to trade off some .45 Colt ammo for some .357 mag."

"But, you didn't have much .357 mag with you," Ron remembered.

“No, but I had a pocket full of Krugerrands,” Gary winked. “You’d be surprised what gold’s worth these days. Six cases of impossible to find ammo for two little coins.”

The men dropped their spent casings off with Herb to be reloaded. He had dies and a mold for the lead slugs. He told them he’d have the ammo reloaded in about a week. They laughed and assured him that there was no hurry. After they had cleaned their new weapons, Ron and Clarence drove over to The Ark 2 and were measured for gun belts. The belts, holsters and rifle scabbards, a last minute idea Ron had, would be ready by the end of the week.

Saturday, June 9th, Ark 1, 9:15 am...

Ron and Clarence were both dressed in blue jeans and western shirts. They had their 'hog legs' strapped on and their rifles in the scabbards. Gary came walking out to join them for the planned target practice. Ron smiled and handed Gary a brown Resistol western hat.

“There you go partner,” Ron laughed, “Welcome to the Pony Patrol!”

“The last time I rode a horse was in 1976,” Gary protested “And I darn near got killed!”

“Relax partner, that horse is as gentle as a lamb.” Ron kidded his friend.

“That’s what they said in 1976,” Gary lamented, refusing to mount the horse, “They gave me a horse named Salina that they only used for kids to ride. First time they ran the horses, she took off like a bat out of hell. Thought I was going to get killed.”

“Well, if this one bolts on you, you can shoot her in the head,” Ron consoled, laughing.

“Yeah, right!” Gary said as he put his rifle in the scabbard and gingerly mounted the horse (named Salina).

They rode for most of the day, making their way to and through the National Forest. Four mounted riders trailed them out of sight, protecting the wannabe cowboys. When finally they returned, none of them could walk nor sit in a chair. Maybe they were temporarily crippled, but they had the times of their lives.

Clarence smiled and said, “Now, fellas, if I could just find a trapdoor Springfield, I’d be a Buffalo Soldier.”